

CHOICE

Supermarket shopping

You tell us what you hate about your supermarket — we tell you which are the cheapest

Cutting your phone bill

Optus vs Telstra — have they got a deal for you?

Thinking of buying a pool?

How not to get ripped off

Shining white teeth

— are they really as close as a new brand of toothpaste?

TESTS

Vacuum cleaners

Garden blower-vacs



Editorial



Suzanne Russell

25% since then, with over 30,000 extra subscribers joining us.

We've also developed new sources of information. The **CHOICE Health Reader** has been very well received by consumers and health professionals alike, and the new **Computer CHOICE** magazine — with its first issue this month — means we can provide consumers with the type of detailed information about this new area of consumer products that ensures everyone can 'tame' the technology for their own use. (See page 4 for more information on this new magazine.) And our home page on the Internet lets you 'tune in' for the latest news on the consumer front.

Our second important aim was to continue and build on our strong public work as advocates for Australian consumers. I'm sure you see our policy team regularly in the media, in debates on issues such as bank charges, health insurance, genetic engineering in food and 'Australian-made' product labelling, among many others. We've made sure the consumer voice is being heard by Australian decision-makers — and your support helps to make that possible.

The Consumers' Association is one of the few truly independent organisations still providing information for people — information that isn't influenced by the vested interests of commercial gain or the political outcomes desired by powerful owners. Thank you for your support: your subscription to our magazines, your purchases of our books, and your letters and phone calls of support provide the resources and determination needed in the fight to maintain and improve consumer interests in this country.

Suzanne Russell
Chair, Consumers' Association Council

Your letters

We welcome the letters you send us, but please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow your letter up. We're sorry we can't personally answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thank you.

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Coming in the next three issues

Tests: Circular saws, dairy desserts, cots, kettles, solar-powered lawnmower, petrol lawn trimmers, suitcases, mozzie zappers and coils,

fake tan preparations, champagne and sparkling wine, electronic organisers, multimedia computers, CHOICE Annual Buying Guide.

◀ Looks like Kermit, but keeps your lawn neat.

Reports: Where to invest \$5000 to \$10,000; setting up a trust fund; wedding photos and videos; vitamin and mineral supplements; travel insurance; sunscreens and sun care; what is home theatre; driving lessons; conveyancing.

We try to bring you tests and reports in the planned month, but sometimes have to move an article because of problems that occur during testing and research, or for lack of space in a particular issue. We apologise if this causes any inconvenience.





CHOICE CUTS

Electromagnetic interference

NEW STANDARDS AGAINST STATIC

ALL NEW ELECTRIC AND electronic products will soon have to meet a number of new Australian standards to reduce electromagnetic interference (EMI).

As our lives become more and more computerised and digitised, electrical pollution is increasingly becoming a problem. Kitchen and other household appliances, hi-fi equipment, computers, TVs, phones, power tools — every electric or electronic product emits electromagnetic fields.

These can interfere with the performance of other products, with results being anything from just

annoying to life-threatening. For example, you're not allowed to use your mobile phone when you're on a plane as it may interfere with the navigation or control systems. And most of us will have experienced some sort of annoying problem caused by EMI: a car alarm set off by a mobile phone, a computer rebooting when you switch on the electric blanket, or static on your TV screen when your next-door neighbour uses their power drill.

The new regulations will come into force from January 1997 for all new products coming onto the market. Products already on the market and continuing to be sold have until January 1999 before they have to meet the new standards.

You'll be able to identify products that meet the new low-interference requirements by a 'C-Tick' label (see picture, left). As the industry moves towards the deadline, the labels will start to appear. So it's already worth watching out for the C-Tick next time you go shopping.



Consumer action

DO YOU WANT TO JOIN US?

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT of becoming a member of the Australian Consumers' Association, the publisher of CHOICE? The consumer movement is more relevant now than ever, and your support will help us maintain the balance between corporate and consumer power. Help us fight for your consumer rights!

Membership is \$75 per year and members receive both CHOICE and *Consuming Interest* magazines. *Consuming Interest* is our quarterly policy and campaigning magazine, which contains news, views and hard-hitting debates about current consumer issues such as bank fees, health insurance, genetic engineering in food and many other topics.

Members are also entitled to vote for our governing body, the ACA Council. Members can stand for Council as well; however, to preserve the Consumers' Association's independence, no Council member can be a major player in industry, advertising or sales.

An election for our Council is coming up in October, so if you're interested in becoming a member and using your vote, please write to: Subscriptions, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or send a fax to (02) 9577 3355. We need to hear from you by the end of this month.

If you would like more information, please ring our Consumer Information Service on (02) 9577 3399.

Corrections

COLD AND FLU REMEDIES

CHOICE, July 1996

On page 7 we said, "Echinacea and garlic tablets are also touted to help colds, but only folklore supports their effectiveness — there's no scientific proof that they help." A better statement of the overall picture would be that while folklore supports their effectiveness, scientific evidence is inconclusive. There is some evidence that garlic has anti-viral properties and some studies suggest that the pure herb echinacea, taken in large doses, may help reduce cold and flu symptoms.

KEEPING CAR THIEVES GROUNDED

CHOICE, June 1996

On page 10 we said, "Western Australia is the only state where discounts are commonly offered, but a spokesperson for the RACWA said this too will probably be phased out."

In fact, the RACWA's position is that these discounts are constantly being reviewed in the light of new developments in car security.

CHOICE publications

A NEW COMPUTER CHOICE

WITH COMPUTERS BECOMING a part of life at home for many people, the Consumers' Association's new magazine, *Computer CHOICE*, is designed to make the whole process of buying and using a computer system much easier.

John Pospisil, the editor of *Computer CHOICE* and author of the popular CHOICE book, *How to buy a computer*, says the magazine is a no-nonsense guide for both existing computer owners and those intending to buy a computer for home use.

"*Computer CHOICE* cuts through the hype of the computer industry to tell consumers what they need to know to get the most from their computer. It explains technical information and jargon in plain English.

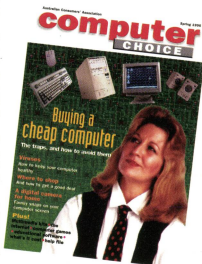
"Like CHOICE, there is no advertising in the magazine, and we buy all the products we test. This ensures we are completely independent."

In the September issue, *Computer CHOICE* looks at what you get when you buy a multimedia computer for under \$2000. The report reveals a number of traps, including:

- Computers that didn't work.
- Pirated software.
- Poor service and support.

However, some cheap computers are worth buying, and the *Computer CHOICE* report shows you how to find them.

Computer CHOICE is published quarterly and a subscription costs \$32 per year (*CHOICE* subscribers pay \$28). Call (02) 9577 3277 to subscribe, or fill in the order form on page 40.



MARKETING — 1: ENVIRONMENT — 0

FOR YEARS WE'VE been inundated with consumer complaints about excess packaging, but superfluous cardboard boxes still adorn far too many of the products in our shops.

While some manufacturers and retailers have responded to consumers' environmental concerns with reduced or reusable packaging, others don't seem to be able to kick the excess packaging habit or, worse, add new packaging in an attempt to upgrade a low-cost product.

John H. of Mildura, a CHOICE subscriber and long-time user of Mennen Skin Bracer pre-electric shave lotion, recently decided to stop buying the product. It was previously made in the US and sold without a box, but it's now made in Australia, comes in a glossy cardboard box and costs 80% more.

"I appreciate that inflation does happen, but I fail to understand why a product which has been marketed for years without a carton suddenly needs one, and increases in price for this privilege by 80%, especially as it's now locally made instead of imported," he says.

The 80% price increase is not only due to the addition of a carton, says the manufacturer, Colgate-Palmolive. Some of its Mennen products have been "improved",



Add a box, up the price and increase sales? We hope not.

we were told, which involved shifting the production from the US to Australia to reformulate the fragrance. And as smaller quantities are made here than in the US, production costs are higher.

The product's fragrance was improved and a box added in the hope of increasing sales — retailers want boxes, we were told. If the sales figures come up to expectations, Colgate-Palmolive says it'll look into getting a cheaper carton, which could bring the price down a little.

If you're a Mennen buyer, don't hold your breath. The national buyer of one variety chain told us sales of the product were down in the first two months since the change.

Are you willing to pay 80% more for a different fragrance, the Australian-made tag and a useless box?

ROCK-A-BYE BABY

FOLLOWING THE FINDINGS of coronial inquiries into two infant deaths, Standards Australia recently published a standard for rocking cradle safety.

Called *Infants' rocking cradles — Safety requirements*, it addresses concerns about potential suffocation hazards with some rocking cradles. However, like the standard for cots, it isn't mandatory — there's no pressure on manufacturers to comply.

If CHOICE's experience with cots is anything to go by, a voluntary standard for cradle safety simply isn't good enough. In next month's CHOICE we'll be publishing the alarming findings of our latest test of regular cots — it's a chilling indictment of voluntary standards.

In fact, based on the coroners' findings into the two rocking-cradle deaths and the lack of a mandatory standard, our advice is that parents think twice before buying a rocking cradle.

If you want to check the safety of any cradle you already have, here are some of the hazards:

■ The Standards Australia committee thought that lack of ventilation had contributed to infant deaths from asphyxiation. Consequently the standard emphasises that both the construction of the cradle and the mattress should allow for adequate ventilation. The mattress and any cushioning should be firm, so the baby's face can't sink into it and restrict breathing.

■ Some cradles have locking pins that need to be put in place manually to prevent the cradle from rocking on its own when you're not present. Parents could forget the pin, or an older child could pull it out. If the baby then moves, the cradle could tilt to one side and the baby roll into a corner and suffocate.

The voluntary standard doesn't require a cradle to have a fail-safe mechanism to help prevent this, whereby the base would automatically return to the horizontal position. However, the introduction to the standard encourages manufacturers to build in this mechanism, and CHOICE would like to see at least this made mandatory. At present there's no cradle with this safety feature on the market in Australia — high time manufacturers started working on it.



With links to infant deaths and no mandatory standard, rocking cradles are a risky purchase.

Customer charters

INSURANCE PUTS ITS MONEY WHERE ITS MOUTH IS?

WHEN COMPANIES PROMISE better customer service, consumers are often disappointed when they actually try to get it. It seems insurance company AAMI may be trying a bit harder with the introduction of its *Customer Charter*. The AAMI initiative covers every aspect of its business — and among its 16 pledges is a \$25 payout if the standards promised are not met.

It also offers a complaints handling scheme and an undertaking to provide customers with the right to see their own personal details held by the company. This might seem a modest concession, but it's one that hasn't been readily made by the insurance industry in the past.

The AAMI charter actually goes beyond the requirements of the General Insurance Code of Practice, and none of the 16 pledges resembles the type of 'feel-good' statements typical of a cynical marketing exercise. And the AAMI charter will be independently audited each year.

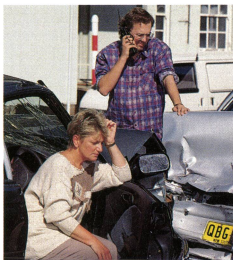
So how much will the \$25 pledge actually cost AAMI? The experience from other financial organisations may be a guide: ■ ANZ will give account holders \$5 if they have to queue for longer than five minutes. In just over two years it has paid out over half a million dollars.

■ In the UK, the Co-operative Bank pays its customers £10 (\$20) every time a mistake is spotted —

and it's paying out an average of £6000 each month (around \$144,000 a year).

While amounts like these won't bankrupt a major financial institution, they do indicate the kind of investment some companies are now prepared to make in genuine customer service in order to foster customer loyalty.

We'll be looking with interest to see if the AAMI charter delivers what it promises.



Insurance — perhaps one company is putting its money where its mouth is.

Our latest supermarket price survey revealed the same cheapest city and the same cheapest chains as before — and also some significant price drops for some of the 'no-name' products.



Shopping at the right price

WHAT DO NEWCASTLE, WHYALLA and Wollongong have in common? Steelworks, of course, but also the cheapest supermarkets in Australia. For the fifth time in a row, Newcastle supermarkets have beaten their counterparts in 23 other locations in our regular supermarket price survey.

No matter whether you're after a basket full of well-known brand names

or just the least expensive products available, on average in Newcastle they'll be the cheapest. But that's not all the good news for Newcastle shoppers. The average price for the basket of the cheapest available products fell there by 5% since our last survey in 1994. Only in Rockingham, WA, did the price for this basket drop even more — it cost 7% less than two years ago.

The only other city where the average price for a basket of the cheapest available products dropped — by 1% — was Wollongong. In Bunbury (WA), Canberra and the Central Coast of NSW the price for this basket stayed the same, and everywhere else it went up — from 1% in Darwin, Melbourne and Sydney to 11% in Tamworth, NSW.

SAVING WITH 'NO-NAME' PRODUCTS

Overall, prices for our supermarket basket of the cheapest available products

rose on average by 1% over the last two years. That's well below inflation — the consumer price index (CPI) has gone up 7.8% since our last survey two years ago. The CPI covers a wide range of goods and services; food is its biggest component, forming 18% of the CPI — it rose by 5.6% over the same period.

If you're satisfied with the quality of the cheapest available products, you can certainly save a packet if you're not brand-loyal and are happy to switch to 'no-names' in some cases.

OVERALL PRICE TRENDS

It's more likely, however, that you don't *only* buy what's cheapest — you probably have a combination of more expensive brand-name products as well as cheaper brands and 'no-names' in your shopping trolley. And in this case, your weekly shopping bill will have increased since we last surveyed supermarket prices.

(to page 8)

IN BRIEF

CHEAPEST CHAIN: Franklins

CHEAPEST CITIES: Newcastle, Whyalla, Wollongong

CHEAPEST STATES: NSW, SA

MOST EXPENSIVE CHAIN: Coles

MOST EXPENSIVE CITIES: Launceston, Hobart, Darwin

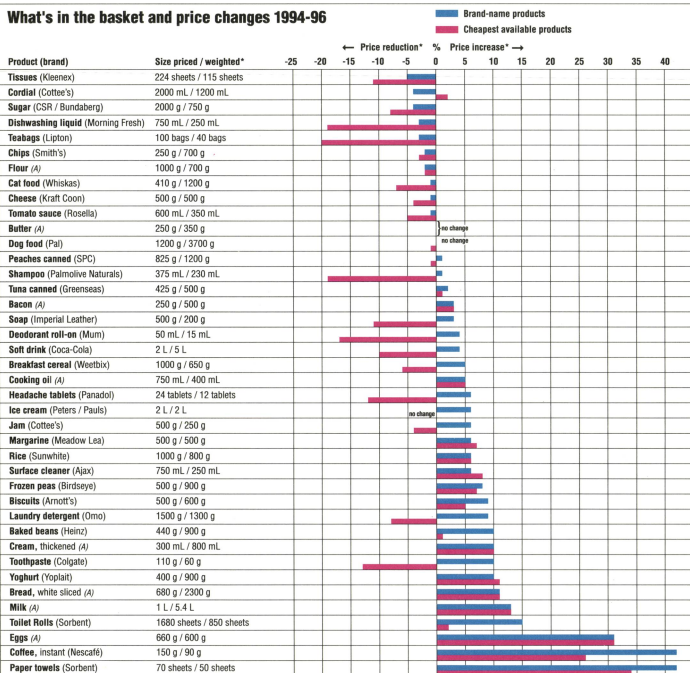
MOST EXPENSIVE STATE: Tasmania

The survey

Over two days in February this year, our pricers checked the prices of around 40 items for each of the brand-name and cheapest available baskets in 149 supermarkets in 24 locations around Australia. As in previous years, we covered all capitals and a number of large cities, but this year we selected a few different regional centres to give readers there a chance to find out how their shops rate. As far as possible, we chose supermarkets that are close to and so competing with each other.

Fresh meat, fruit and vegetables were excluded — not all supermarkets sell them and to compare prices for fresh produce, it must be of the same quality. We priced the products in the size most commonly sold and then adjusted the prices to what a family of two adults, one child, a dog and a cat would consume in a week — for example, not the 100 teabags in the box, but 40. Because of this 'weighting', we can compare this year's prices with those we had to pay two years ago, even if a manufacturer has changed the size of a product since our last survey. The prices quoted throughout this article are based, as in previous years, on this 'weighted' size.

What's in the basket and price changes 1994-96



* The price changes are based on the 'weighted' size of products — see *The survey*, above. No bar means no change.
(A) Bacon, bread, butter, cream, egg, flour, milk and oil brands vary too much between the states, so we've chosen the cheapest available product for the brand-name basket too.

Table 1. The products we priced, in order of biggest price reduction for the brand-name products since our 1994 survey down to their highest price increase. The brand names shown in brackets are those we priced for that basket; in the cheapest available basket the products could be any brand or a 'no-name' version.

In all the centres we surveyed, the price for our basket of brand-name products went up — from 2% in Bunbury, WA, to 11% in Tamworth, NSW — on average by about 6%. That's in line with the rise of the CPI's food component over the same period.

For the brand-name products, the only price rises we recorded below the national average were in the NT (5%) and WA (3%). However, in these states both the brand-name and the cheapest available products still cost more than anywhere else — except Tasmania.

Supermarkets there, as in previous surveys, were the most expensive in our survey. Hobart and Launceston were again the most expensive cities. And if we look at average supermarket prices by state, Tasmania not only had the highest prices but also the highest increase (8%) for the basket of brand-name products, and the second-highest (5%) for the cheapest goods.

THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

Hobart, Launceston, Perth and Darwin have for years been among the most expensive cities in our survey. This year's average price analysis by both state and city confirms past trends. Higher transport costs to geographically isolated places — or to Tasmania, where many groceries have to be shipped — have driven prices up.

Many of the big national manufacturers are based in Sydney or elsewhere

How the major supermarkets compare — % more or less expensive than average

Chain or group (number of stores surveyed)	Brand-name basket	Cheapest available basket
FRANKLINS (26) (A)	5% cheaper	7% cheaper
JEWEL (15)	1% cheaper	3% cheaper
BI-LO (9) (B)	average	1% cheaper
WOOLWORTHS (31)	1% more expensive	2% more expensive
SAFeway (8)	2% more expensive	1% cheaper
COLES (42)	3% more expensive	5% more expensive

(A) Includes No Frills, Fresh and Big Fresh stores.

(B) Excludes Bi-Lo in WA, where each store is independently owned. In all other states Bi-Lo is owned by Coles.

in NSW, which is probably why supermarkets in Sydney have consistently been cheaper in our surveys than in Melbourne.

THE CHEAPEST CHAINS

Altogether we collected prices in 149 supermarkets. Most of these were members of chains or groups. To find out how they compare for price, we averaged the basket prices for each chain and compared this price with the average basket price of all the supermarkets in our survey. This way you can get an idea whether the supermarket you shop at is generally more or less expensive than the average across the country. *How the major supermarkets compare*, above, shows the results.

If we compare them with those from our last survey two years ago, there has been little movement between the supermarket chains. Franklins (which includes No Frills, Fresh, and Big Fresh stores) remained at the top — it was again the cheapest chain overall for both our baskets, and Jewel and Bi-Lo held their second and third place. Coles remained the most expensive of the bigger supermarkets.

THE CHEAPEST AND DEAREST BASKETS

We also looked at the 20 least expensive baskets (of both the brand-name and

cheap products) in our survey. Not surprisingly, more than half came from Franklins. The cheapest brand-name basket in our survey came from Franklins at Stockland Mall in the Newcastle suburb of Jesmond. It cost just over \$92. The most expensive version of this basket cost nearly \$35 more and came from Sam's at Invermay, Launceston.

The least expensive basket of the cheapest available products again came from a Franklins, this time at Belconnen Mall (in the Canberra suburb of Belconnen) — it cost just over \$64. The most expensive basket cost over \$44 more and, again, came from Sam's at Invermay, Launceston.

EXTREME PRICE HIKES ...

Table 1 on page 7 lists all the items we surveyed and by how much their prices have risen or dropped since our last survey two years ago.

Nescafé instant coffee and Sorbent paper towels recorded the highest price rise since our last survey — 42%. The price for the cheapest available of these products also rose dramatically. According to Nescafé manufacturer Nestlé Foods, frosts in the 1994 Brazilian winter resulted in a 300% increase in the coffee bean price, which explains the steep coffee price rise.

Sorbent paper products manufacturer Carter Holt Harvey told us its toilet tissue is predominantly made from imported pulp, which rose in price by 87% between 1993 and 1995. The company also said it had improved the quality of its paper towels and had invested in multi-coloured prints for both products. This was why the price for its paper towels had increased by 26% since 1994, we were told.

But according to our figures, the price rise is much higher — 42%. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that we had found a lower price



Buying the cheapest available products — often 'no-name' brands — rather than being brand-loyal can save you between \$20 and \$30 a week, if your supermarket bill comes to roughly \$100. Over a year, that adds up to \$1000 to \$1500.



Eggs, coffee and paper towels have soared in price since 1994, even for the cheapest available brands. At the other end of the scale, a few brand-name products have come down in price, such as Kleenex tissues, Cottee's cordial and sugar.

than the company for the product in our 1994 survey and a higher price in 1996, and we priced the product in more supermarkets than just those belonging to four major chains, which was the source of the company's data.

The price for eggs has gone up dramatically too — by 31%. According to the Executive Director of the Australian Egg Industry Association, Hugh McMaster, there are two major reasons for this price hike — the increased cost of feed grain and a deregulated egg market. Feed grain constitutes the bulk of egg producers' costs. Recent droughts in NSW and Queensland and a global shortage of feed grain have driven its price up sharply over the last two years.

The other reason for the extreme price rise is that the egg market is largely deregulated now — only the WA market is still heavily regulated. In the past, when government bodies regulated the egg market, production was adjusted according to demand, so prices were more reliable and predictable. In a deregulated market, the egg price usually fluctuates in cycles. When there's a shortage of eggs, the price goes up, producers get good returns and can build up their stock. This in turn can lead to a surplus — as we saw at the time of our last survey in 1994 — which brings prices down again.

... AND DIVES

Our basket of the cheapest available products (which could include 'no-name' or brand-name products, whichever was the cheapest) held quite a few surprises. Not only did half of these products cost less than two years ago, the price of one in every five dropped by more than 10%.

Cheap dishwashing liquid, headache tablets, toothpaste and tissues had already become cheaper between 1993 and 1994 and they dropped again in price this survey. Cheap toiletries such as shampoo, roll-on deodorant and soap also became less expensive, as did cheap teabags.

Ken Henrick, the Assistant Director of the Australian Supermarket Institute, says the Australian grocery industry has always been extremely competitive by international standards. Add to that the recession of the late 1980s and fierce competition between major supermarket chains — particularly in NSW, SA and Victoria — and you get more cheap brands and 'no-name' products on the shelves and at lower prices.

The increased competition from 'no-name' products also seems to have had an effect on the price of some brand-name products. One in five of these products in our basket had also dropped in price, but the reductions weren't quite as dramatic.

As in our previous survey, Kleenex tissues had the greatest percentage decrease (5%) in price. Kleenex manufacturer Kimberley-Clark says despite the global price increase for paper pulp, competition has forced prices down in the paper tissue market — which forms an interesting contrast to paper towels, where Sorbent's manufacturer quoted the same price increase in pulp to explain the large price rise.

Other manufacturers whose products had price reductions of 3% or more also stated competition for market share as the main factor that had brought their prices down.

Cheapest cities and price changes, 1994-96

1996 Rank	Location (1994 rank)	Average price (\$)	Price change (%)
BRAND-NAME BASKET			
1	Newcastle (1)	98.64	5
2	Whyalla (ns)	99.50	ns
3	Wollongong (6)	102.27	5
4	Sydney (5)	103.29	6
5	Brisbane (4)	103.45	6
6	Adelaide (2)	103.61	8
7	Bendigo (ns)	104.63	ns
8	Canberra (11)	104.71	6
9	Central Coast (7)	104.82	7
10	Orange (9)	105.00	7
11	Toowoomba (3)	105.01	9
12	Gold Coast (8)	105.63	7
13	Ballarat (14)	105.66	6
14	Wagga Wagga (ns)	106.50	ns
15	Cairns (ns)	106.96	ns
16	Melbourne (15)	107.01	7
17	Bunbury (18)	107.82	2
18	Perth (17)	108.20	3
19	Rockingham (19)	108.83	3
20	Tamworth (12)	109.56	11
21	Geelong (16)	110.10	7
22	Darwin (20)	119.06	5
23	Launceston (22)	123.72	6
24	Hobart (21)	123.81	9
CHEAPEST AVAILABLE BASKET			
1	Newcastle (2)	68.20	-5
2	Whyalla (ns)	72.55	ns
3	Wollongong (4)	73.14	-1
4	Central Coast (5)	74.04	no change
5	Bendigo (ns)	74.33	ns
6	Sydney (6)	74.64	1
7	Melbourne (10)	75.48	1
8	Canberra (12)	75.54	no change
9	Ballarat (7)	75.58	2
10	Adelaide (1)	75.81	7
11	Toowoomba (3)	75.93	4
12	Wagga Wagga (ns)	76.71	ns
13	Orange (14)	77.20	2
14	Brisbane (9)	77.33	3
15	Gold Coast (8)	78.68	5
16	Cairns (ns)	82.31	ns
17	Tamworth (11)	83.45	11
18	Geelong (16)	84.13	7
19	Rockingham (21)	85.14	-7
20	Bunbury (18)	86.70	no change
21	Perth (17)	87.74	3
22	Darwin (19)	90.08	1
23	Hobart (20)	93.23	3
24	Launceston (22)	100.89	8

ns Not surveyed in 1994, so a comparison is not possible this year.

Buying the brand-name basket

Rank	Supermarket / location	Price (\$)
ADELAIDE		
1	Franklins, Salisbury Downs	\$ 95.99
2	Franklins, Port Adelaide	\$ 97.17
3	Franklins, Unley	\$101.41
4	Bi-Lo, Port Adelaide	\$102.59
5	Woolworths, Salisbury	\$104.04
6	Coles, Port Adelaide	\$104.26
7	Bi-Lo, Parakana SC, Salisbury	\$104.77
8	Woolworths, Unley	\$105.03
9	Coles, Salisbury Downs	\$105.58
10	Coles, Unley	\$105.90
11	Foodland, Salisbury (A)	\$112.97
BALLARAT		
1	Franklins Fresh, Ballarat	\$101.46
2	Jewel Warehouse, Ballarat	\$105.80
3	Safeway, Sebastopol	\$106.74
4	Coles, Ballarat	\$108.62
BENDIGO		
1	Franklins, Kangaroo Flat	\$102.34
2	Jewel, Bendigo	\$102.96
3	Safeway, Market Place, Bendigo	\$105.65
4	Coles, Bendigo	\$105.77
BRISBANE		
1	Franklins, Stafford	\$ 96.70
2	Franklins, Ipswich	\$ 99.14
3	Franklins, Capalaba Park SC	\$ 99.57
4	Franklins, Mt Gravatt	\$ 99.62
5	Coles, Capalaba	\$103.50
6	Coles, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$103.73
7	Woolworths, Alexandra Hills	\$104.37
8	Woolworths, Stafford	\$105.12
9	Bi-Lo, Stafford (A)	\$105.75
10	Woolworths, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$105.91
11	Woolworths, Ipswich City SC	\$106.82
12	Coles, Sunnybank	\$106.91
13	Coles, Ipswich	\$107.68
BUNBURY		
1	Coles, Stephen St	\$106.40
2	Woolworths, Bunbury Forum	\$109.23
CAIRNS		
1	Franklins, Earlville	\$103.16
2	Woolworths, Earlville	\$107.17
3	Coles, Westcourt	\$110.56
CANBERRA		
1	Franklins, Belconnen	\$ 99.97
2	Woolworths, Tuggeranong	\$102.93
3	Woolworths, Belconnen	\$103.20
4	Jewel Food Barn, Tuggeranong	\$104.65
5	Coles, Belconnen	\$104.92
6	Coles, Tuggeranong	\$107.30
7	Cannon's Supermarket, Mawson (A)	\$110.03
CENTRAL COAST, NSW		
1	Franklins, Erina	\$101.73
2	Woolworths, Erina	\$104.87
3	Coles, West Gosford	\$105.84
4	Jewel Food Barn, Erina	\$106.82

DARWIN		
1	Woolworths, Casuarina	\$115.48
2	Coles, Casuarina	\$116.16
3	The Big Crow, Casuarina (B)	\$118.03
4	Rite Price, Nightcliff	\$126.56
GEELONG		
1	Franklins Fresh, Warrn Ponds	\$104.56
2	Coles, Geelong	\$107.54
3	Jewel Food Barn, Geelong	\$107.97
4	Safeway, Market Square	\$108.30
5	Safeway, Warrn Ponds	\$109.16
6	Foodtown, Geelong East	\$123.09
GOLD COAST		
1	Franklins, Southport	\$100.62
2	Coles, Southport	\$106.14
3	Woolworths, Southport	\$106.82
4	Woolworths, Tweed Heads	\$107.04
5	Coles, Tweed Mail SC, Tweed Heads	\$107.54
HOBART		
1	Coles, Glenorchy Central SC	\$122.33
2	Coles, Sandy Bay	\$123.24
3	Coles, Rosny	\$123.56
4	Purity, Glenorchy	\$124.45
5	Purity, Eastlands SC, Rosny Park	\$124.60
6	Purity, Sandy Bay	\$124.67
LAUNCESTON		
1	Roelf Vos, Newnham	\$120.98
2	Coles, Mowbray	\$122.96
3	Sam's, Invermay	\$127.21
MELBOURNE		
1	Franklins, Preston	\$ 99.51
2	Franklins, Werribee	\$101.57
3	Bi-Lo, Werribee	\$105.00
4	Coles, Preston	\$105.04
5	Jewel Food Barn, Ferntree Gully	\$105.63
6	Jewel Food Barn, Croydon	\$105.65
7	Bi-Lo, Croydon	\$105.74
8	Jewel Warehouse Store, Werribee	\$105.86
9	Coles, Croydon	\$106.14
10	Coles, Werribee	\$106.44
11	Safeway, Croydon	\$106.54
12	Safeway, Ferntree Gully	\$107.46
13	Safeway, Werribee	\$108.59
14	Coles, Ferntree Gully	\$108.88
15	Festival IGA, Croydon (C)	\$109.80
16	Safeway, Murray Rd, Preston	\$110.18
17	Foodtown, Ferntree Gully	\$121.06
NEWCASTLE		
1	Franklins, Jesmond	\$ 92.32
2	Jewel Food Barn, Wallsend	\$ 97.99
3	Woolworths, Jesmond	\$ 99.73
4	Coles, Garden City	\$ 99.76
5	Woolworths, Kotara	\$ 99.98
6	Coles, Wallsend	\$102.07
ORANGE		
1	Franklins Fresh, Orange	\$100.69
2	Woolworths, Orange	\$106.46
3	Coles, Orange	\$107.84

PERTH		
1	Coles, Warwick	\$104.51
2	Coles, Subiaco	\$106.11
3	Farmer Jack's, Midland	\$107.70
4	Action Food Barns, Warwick	\$108.08
5	Action Food Barns, Midland	\$108.52
6	Coles, Maddington	\$108.78
7	Action Food Barns, Maddington	\$108.86
8	Woolworths, Maddington	\$108.89
9	Woolworths, Warwick	\$109.00
10	Woolworths, Subiaco	\$109.16
11	Woolworths, Midland Gate SC	\$109.24
12	Coles, Midland	\$109.53
ROCKINGHAM		
1	Coles, Rockingham	\$106.25
2	Woolworths, Rockingham	\$107.44
3	Bi-Lo, Rockingham	\$112.81
SYDNEY		
1	Franklins Big Fresh, Mt Druitt	\$ 94.04
2	Franklins Big Fresh, Campbelltown	\$ 99.63
3	Franklins, Castle Towers, Castle Hill	\$ 99.74
4	Jewel Super J, Mt Druitt	\$ 99.88
5	Franklins Big Fresh, Marrickville	\$100.00
6	Franklins, Westfield Mall, Miranda	\$100.25
7	Woolworths, Mt Druitt	\$100.96
8	Jewel Warehouse Store, C'belltown	\$101.20
9	Coles, Mt Druitt	\$102.53
10	Woolworths, Marrickville	\$104.76
11	Jewel Food Barn, Castle Hill (A)	\$105.15
12	Jewel Food Barn, Marrickville	\$105.28
13	Coles, Castle Hill	\$106.14
14	Coles, Miranda	\$106.28
15	Woolworths, Campbelltown	\$106.65
16	Woolworths, Miranda	\$108.05
17	Coles, Campbelltown	\$108.93
18	Bi-Lo, Marrickville	\$109.83
TAMWORTH		
1	Woolworths, Tamworth	\$106.01
2	Coles, Tamworth	\$110.49
3	Bi-Lo, Tamworth	\$112.17
TOOWOOMBA		
1	Franklins Big Fresh, Clifford Gdns	\$102.86
2	Coles, Toowoomba Plaza SC	\$104.59
3	Bi-Lo, Toowoomba	\$106.29
4	Woolworths, Clifford Gdns	\$106.30
WAGGA WAGGA		
1	Jewel Food Barn, Wagga Wagga	\$106.26
2	Woolworths, Wagga Wagga	\$106.31
3	Coles, Wagga Wagga	\$106.92
WHYALLA		
1	Bi-Lo, Whyalla Norrie	\$ 98.05
2	Woolworths, Whyalla Norrie	\$ 98.61
3	IGA Foodland, Whyalla Stuart	\$101.84
WOLLONGONG		
1	Franklins, Wollongong	\$ 99.27
2	Franklins, Shellharbour	\$ 99.47
3	Coles, Shellharbour	\$101.61
4	Woolworths, Wollongong	\$103.72
5	Jewel Food Barn, Wollongong	\$107.26

SC Shopping centre.
 (A) This supermarket has since closed.
 (B) This supermarket is now Rainbow
 (C) This supermarket is now Jewel Country Fresh.

The cheapest available basket

Rank	Supermarket / location	Price (\$)
ADELAIDE		
1	Franklin's No Frills, Port Adelaide	\$66.84
2	Franklin's, Unley	\$70.43
3	Bi-Lo, Port Adelaide	\$72.47
4	Coles, Port Adelaide	\$73.19
5	Franklin's, Salisbury Downs	\$73.34
6	Woolworths, Unley	\$74.51
7	Coles, Unley	\$76.41
8	Woolworths, Salisbury	\$77.72
9	Coles, Salisbury Downs	\$78.03
10	Bi-Lo, Parbanks SC, Salisbury	\$81.43
11	Foodland, Salisbury (A)	\$89.54
BALLARAT		
1	Franklin's Fresh, Ballarat	\$73.70
2	Safeway, Sebastopol	\$74.17
3	Jewel Warehouse, Ballarat	\$74.82
4	Coles, Ballarat	\$79.62
BENDIGO		
1	Franklin's, Kangaroo Flat	\$69.62
2	Jewel, Bendigo	\$72.54
3	Safeway, Market Place, Bendigo	\$74.50
4	Coles, Bendigo	\$80.67
BRISBANE		
1	Franklin's, Mt Gravatt	\$71.41
2	Franklin's, Capalaba Park SC	\$72.45
3	Franklin's, Stafford	\$73.96
4	Woolworths, Alexandra Hills	\$74.71
5	Franklin's, Ipswich	\$75.28
6	Bi-Lo, Stafford (A)	\$76.27
7	Coles, Capalaba	\$76.66
8	Coles, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$77.77
9	Woolworths, Upper Mt Gravatt	\$78.38
10	Coles, Sunnybank	\$79.54
11	Woolworths, Stafford	\$80.05
12	Coles, Ipswich	\$82.98
13	Woolworths, Ipswich City SC	\$85.77
BUNBURY		
1	Coles, Stephen St	\$84.62
2	Woolworths, Bunbury Forum	\$88.77
CAIRNS		
1	Franklin's, Earville	\$76.08
2	Woolworths, Earville	\$82.02
3	Coles, Westcourt	\$88.82
CANBERRA		
1	Franklin's, Belconnen	\$64.42
2	Woolworths, Belconnen	\$70.38
3	Coles, Belconnen	\$71.57
4	Woolworths, Tuggeranong	\$78.38
5	Cannon's Supermarket, Mawson (A)	\$80.05
6	Jewel Food Barn, Tuggeranong	\$81.71
7	Coles, Tuggeranong	\$82.24
CENTRAL COAST, NSW		
1	Franklin's No Frills, Erina	\$70.09
2	Woolworths, Erina	\$71.48
3	Coles, West Gosford	\$77.27
4	Jewel Food Barn, Erina	\$77.30

DARWIN		
1	Woolworths, Casuarina	\$83.29
2	Coles, Casuarina	\$86.04
3	The Big Crow, Casuarina (B)	\$89.72
4	Rite Price, Nightcliff	\$101.26
GEELONG		
1	Franklin's Fresh, Waurm Ponds	\$77.87
2	Safeway, Market Square	\$78.38
3	Safeway, Waurm Ponds	\$78.93
4	Coles, Geelong	\$79.48
5	Jewel Food Barn, Geelong	\$81.88
6	Foodtown, Geelong East	\$108.24
GOLD COAST		
1	Franklin's No Frills, Southport	\$73.69
2	Woolworths, Tweed Heads	\$76.43
3	Woolworths, Southport	\$80.83
4	Coles, Southport	\$81.01
5	Coles, Tweed Mall SC, Tweed Heads	\$81.46
HOBART		
1	Coles, Rosny	\$90.26
2	Coles, Glenorchy Central SC	\$90.68
3	Coles, Sandy Bay	\$90.96
4	Purity, Sandy Bay	\$95.08
5	Purity, Glenorchy	\$96.01
6	Purity, Eastlands SC, Rosny Park	\$96.39
LAUNCESTON		
1	Coles, Mowbray	\$95.84
2	Roelf Vos, Newnham	\$98.04
3	Sam's, Invermay	\$108.78
MELBOURNE		
1	Bi-Lo, Werribee	\$68.61
2	Jewel Food Barn, Croydon	\$71.01
3	Bi-Lo, Croydon	\$71.05
4	Jewel Food Barn, Ferntree Gully	\$71.72
5	Safeway, Croydon	\$72.22
6	Safeway, Ferntree Gully	\$72.52
7	Coles, Werribee	\$72.95
8	Franklin's, Werribee	\$72.98
9	Jewel Warehouse Store, Werribee	\$73.40
10	Coles, Croydon	\$73.72
11	Coles, Ferntree Gully	\$75.37
12	Safeway, Werribee	\$76.10
13	Franklin's, Preston	\$77.25
14	Festival IGA, Croydon (C)	\$79.52
15	Coles, Preston	\$79.73
16	Safeway, Murray Rd, Preston	\$81.46
17	Foodtown, Ferntree Gully	\$93.50
NEWCASTLE		
1	Franklin's, Jesmond	\$64.85
2	Jewel Food Barn, Wallsend	\$66.31
3	Woolworths, Jesmond	\$67.97
4	Woolworths, Kotara	\$68.92
5	Coles, Garden City	\$69.62
6	Coles, Wallsend	\$71.52
ORANGE		
1	Franklin's Fresh, Orange	\$72.91
2	Woolworths, Orange	\$77.62
3	Coles, Orange	\$81.06

PERTH		
1	Coles, Warwick	\$81.70
2	Coles, Subiaco	\$83.58
3	Woolworths, Warwick	\$84.42
4	Action Food Barns, Warwick	\$84.75
5	Woolworths, Subiaco	\$85.03
6	Action Food Barns, Midland	\$86.79
7	Woolworths, Maddington	\$88.10
8	Action Food Barns, Maddington	\$88.70
9	Woolworths, Midland Gate SC	\$90.44
10	Farmer Jack's, Midland	\$91.05
11	Coles, Midland	\$93.55
12	Coles, Maddington	\$94.74
ROCKINGHAM		
1	Coles, Rockingham	\$81.99
2	Woolworths, Rockingham	\$85.89
3	Bi-Lo, Rockingham	\$87.53
SYDNEY		
1	Franklin's Big Fresh, Marrickville	\$68.90
2	Franklin's Big Fresh, Campbelltown	\$68.91
3	Franklin's, Westfield Mall, Miranda	\$69.72
4	Franklin's, Castle Towers, Castle Hill	\$71.58
5	Franklin's Big Fresh, Mt Druitt	\$71.86
6	Jewel Super J, Mt Druitt	\$72.65
7	Woolworths, Campbelltown	\$72.99
8	Jewel Food Barn, Castle Hill (A)	\$73.78
9	Woolworths, Mt Druitt	\$74.54
10	Woolworths, Miranda	\$74.60
11	Jewel Food Barn, Marrickville	\$75.29
12	Coles, Miranda	\$75.57
13	Woolworths, Marrickville	\$75.82
14	Coles, Mt Druitt	\$75.86
15	Jewel Warehouse Store, C'belltown	\$75.92
16	Coles, Campbelltown	\$79.90
17	Bi-Lo, Marrickville	\$81.90
18	Coles, Castle Hill	\$83.68
TAMWORTH		
1	Woolworths, Tamworth	\$78.43
2	Coles, Tamworth	\$84.95
3	Bi-Lo, Tamworth	\$86.98
TOOWOOMBA		
1	Franklin's Big Fresh, Clifford Gdns	\$74.02
2	Coles, Toowoomba Plaza SC	\$74.47
3	Woolworths, Clifford Gdns	\$76.70
4	Bi-Lo, Toowoomba	\$78.53
WAGGA WAGGA		
1	Jewel Food Barn, Wagga Wagga	\$73.28
2	Woolworths, Wagga Wagga	\$77.85
3	Coles, Wagga Wagga	\$79.00
WHYALLA		
1	Bi-Lo, Whyalla Norrie	\$68.23
2	Woolworths, Whyalla Norrie	\$71.99
3	IGA Foodland, Whyalla Stuart	\$77.44
WOLLONGONG		
1	Franklin's, Shellharbour	\$67.35
2	Franklin's, Wollongong	\$71.39
3	Coles, Shellharbour	\$74.12
4	Jewel Food Barn, Wollongong	\$76.03
5	Woolworths, Wollongong	\$76.80

SC Shopping centre.

(A) This supermarket has since closed.

(B) This supermarket is now Rainbow.

(C) This supermarket is now Jewel Country Fresh.

Is your supermarket getting it right?

Of the two major chains, Woolworths shoppers are generally much happier with their supermarket than people who buy at Coles. But a relative newcomer is getting very close to the top at keeping the customer satisfied — Franklins Big Fresh.

WE FOUND NO 'PERFECT' store in our survey, but some did much better than others as far as customer satisfaction is concerned. Table 1 on page 13 lists consumers' overall satisfaction with nine major supermarket chains or groups across Australia; Table 2 gives a more detailed picture state by state. On the whole, shoppers are fairly satisfied with the supermarket they shop at.

The two major competitors, WOOLWORTHS and COLES, stood out in our survey. They're the two supermarket chains for which we received by far the highest number of responses — about 3500 people (26% of responses) shopped at each of these chains. But that's where the similarity ends. As far as customer satisfaction is concerned, WOOLWORTHS left COLES far behind.

As you can see from Tables 1 and 4 on the following pages, WOOLWORTHS

customers were far more satisfied with their supermarket overall and with many of its features than those who shopped at COLES. In fact, WOOLWORTHS customers thought highly of their store in all states where the chain was represented in our survey.

However, in NSW and Queensland, FRANKLINS BIG FRESH shoppers rated this store equally highly — perhaps a sign of future trends for this relative newcomer (see Table 2). BIG FRESH sells fresh produce as well as grocery items, in a similar way to COLES and WOOLWORTHS, but — as our supermarket price survey on page 6 shows — without raising its prices to the levels of these two chains. This may well account for its popularity — certainly shoppers in our

survey rated it particularly highly for competitive prices and good variety and availability of products (see Table 4 on page 14).

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

A lot of people find food shopping a chore, but it's unavoidable for most of us. If the supermarket we use is near our home or workplace, it'll at least take less time to get there. Convenient location was the most important factor for 70% of our survey respondents. For those who shop at FRANKLINS BIG FRESH, however, it was less important — people are obviously prepared to travel further to a store that offers a wide variety of products at competitive prices.

Convenient hours, plenty of parking and a wide variety of products and brands were very important to about half the people in our survey — the most

(to page 14)



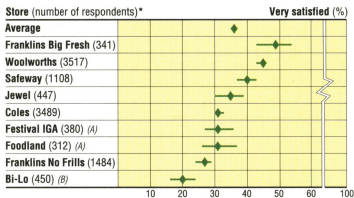
Crawling through the checkout queues was the thing our shoppers hated the most about supermarkets. Take a leaf out of our CHOICE buyers' book — if the queues are unreasonable, talk to the supervisor and press them to open a few more aisles.

Our survey

For years we've surveyed supermarkets to find the cheapest — this year we also set out to find the chains you're most satisfied with. We asked more than 15,000 subscribers across the country to tell us about the one or two supermarkets where they shop regularly.

Thanks to all who returned the questionnaire, and for your additional comments. Over 7700 surveys were returned, and most gave information on two supermarkets, giving us over 13,500 responses. The results are presented in the tables on the following pages. Those supermarket chains or groups where fewer than 50 of our survey respondents shopped were excluded.

Overall consumer satisfaction with major supermarkets



* For this national analysis, we only included supermarket chains or groups for which we received 300 or more responses nationwide.
 (A) Stores are independently owned, but a member of a banner group or franchise.
 (B) Bi-Lo excludes stores in WA, where each store is independently owned. In other states Coles owns the Bi-Lo chain. As only 40 survey respondents shopped at Bi-Lo in WA, we had to exclude it from our analysis.

Table 1

The percentages shown in **Tables 1 and 2** relate to the number of customers who were 'very satisfied' with their supermarket. The bars indicate how closely our survey results would be likely to match reality if we were able to survey all supermarket shoppers in the country.

Statistically, the more responses we got for each supermarket chain or group, the closer to reality the percentage our survey found is likely to be, and therefore the bar is shorter. When comparing supermarkets for overall customer satisfaction, it's important to look at these bars.

As an example, 31% of respondents were 'very satisfied' with **COLES** and **FESTIVAL IGA** supermarkets (see **Table 1**). But as we got nearly 10 times as many responses from **COLES** shoppers as from those who shopped at **FESTIVAL IGA**, we can say with more certainty that 31% of all shoppers are very satisfied with **COLES** — and so the bar is shorter than for **FESTIVAL IGA**.

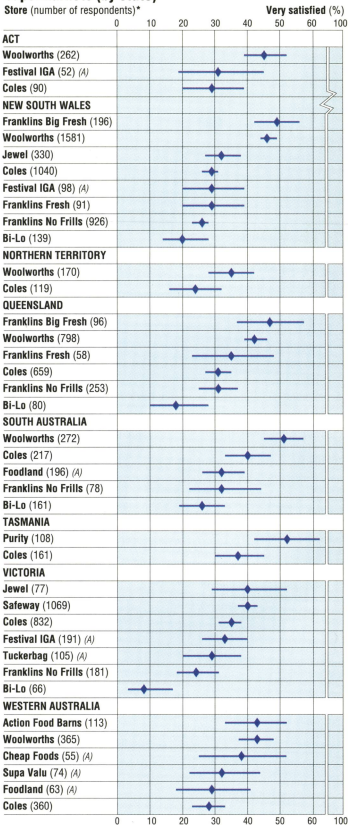
Another example from **Table 2**: in Queensland a higher percentage of **FRANKLINS BIG FRESH** shoppers seem to be 'very satisfied' with their store than **WOOLWORTHS** shoppers. But because the 'reality' bars overlap each other, we can't say definitively that **FRANKLINS BIG FRESH** shoppers were more satisfied than **WOOLWORTHS** shoppers. But we can say with some certainty that in Queensland at least, these two chains are close to equal for customer satisfaction.

'No-name' products: What do people buy?

'No-name' products bought	Shoppers (%) (total no. 7871)
Dry packaged goods (eg cereal, flour, noodles, sugar)	64
Paper products (eg toilet paper, tissues, paper towels)	57
Toiletries	48
Canned or frozen fruit / vegetables	48
Cleaning products	35
Bread	34
Dairy products	33
Pet food	16
Coffee, tea	8
Baby products	6

Table 3

Overall consumer satisfaction with supermarkets (by state)



* For the analysis by state, we included supermarket chains or groups for which we received at least 50 responses.
 (A) Stores are independently owned, but a member of a banner group or franchise.

Table 2

What the supermarkets are getting right

(% of customers 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with particular aspects of their supermarket)

Supermarket (ordered by number of areas more satisfactory than average)	Opening hours (%)	Accuracy of prices entered by cashier (%)	Conditions of goods on shelves (%)	Quality / freshness of speciality sections (%)	Products within use-by-date (%)	Cleanliness (%)	Quality / freshness of meat / poultry (%)	Helpfulness and courtesy of staff (%)	Variety of products / sizes / brands (%)	Availability of products / sizes / brands (%)
Average (%)	97	96	94	93	93	91	91	88	87	85
WOOLWORTHS			96	95	95	95	95	90	92	90
SAFEWAY					96				92	90
FRANKLINS BIG FRESH								93	93	91
COLES	98			91		95			89	
ACTION FOOD BARNs										
PURITY								96		
FRANKLINS NO FRILLS	94	98		na		79	na	85	84	81
FRANKLINS FRESH										
SUPA VALU (A)				na						
JEWEL				na		80	na	82		
FESTIVAL IGA (A)					89				76	76
FOODTOWN (A)					81				64	66
TUCKERBAG (A)					85				65	71
BI-LO (B)			88			75	84	80	71	70
FOODLAND (A)	93		88		82	86	79		76	76
PAYLESS (A)			80	na	77		na		65	
RITWAY (A)				na			na		61	64

Table 4

= Significantly better than average for satisfaction in this area.

= Significantly worse than average for satisfaction in this area.

A blank column means the satisfaction rate was about average.

Cannons and Cheap Foods aren't in the table because they had no areas that shoppers were more or less satisfied with than average.

na Not applicable — these stores don't have these speciality sections or we had fewer than 50 respondents who bought these foods.

(A) Stores are independently owned, but a member of a banner group or franchise.

(B) Bi-Lo excludes stores in WA, where each store is independently owned. In other states Coles owns the Bi-Lo chain.

Does pushing a trolley make you feel like a stunt driver? Congested supermarket aisles were second on people's hate list: the only thing considered worse was long queues at the cash register.



important factors after location. Bonus reward schemes and home delivery mattered the least to our respondents, although the latter may well contribute to some people's choice of supermarket, such as those who are older or don't have a car.

Not surprisingly, for people who shopped at the three chains that rated least expensive in our supermarket price survey (FRANKLINS, JEWEL and BI-LO), low prices were much more important than for those who used COLES, SAFEWAY or WOOLWORTHS, or most smaller supermarkets.

GETTING IT RIGHT — OR WRONG

As well as areas of general satisfaction, there were also things many shoppers weren't happy with — speed at the checkout was the most common. As one shopper lamented: "It's easy to get in, but, oh, the waiting to get out!"

Consumers seem to be happy with the more liberal opening hours introduced in recent years; only 3% were

the features and attributes of particular supermarket chains and groups in our survey.

SPECIALITY AND FRESH FOODS

While many smaller stores have fresh produce on offer, you're more likely to find speciality sections (such as an on-site bakery, a fresh fish and seafood department or a salad bar) in supermarkets that belong to a chain. FRANKLINS NO FRILLS and JEWEL chains are the exception here — these stores' success is generally built on cheap prices and perceived good value rather than on a wide variety of speciality and fresh foods.

As the number of fresh food sections in supermarkets is growing, so is their popularity among shoppers. Generally speaking, the more widespread and established a speciality section, the more people use it.

For example, fruit and vegetables, meat and delicatessen products are offered by at least 73% of the supermarkets our respondents shopped at. People who bought their fresh foods in a supermarket were more inclined to buy from these established speciality sections than from fresh fish sections or salad bars, which have been available in supermarkets for a shorter time. Less than a third of our respondents bought fish or salad at a supermarket, although about half the stores in our survey had a salad bar and about one-third a fresh fish department.

On-site bakeries, on the other hand, seem to have taken off rather well. Perhaps it's the aroma of freshly baked bread that made two-thirds of our respondents buy fresh bread at their supermarket — yet it was offered by less than half the supermarkets in our survey.

FRESH QUALITY NOT SO GOOD

Satisfaction with the quality of the fresh produce for sale in a supermarket seems to be a different story, though. "More often than not it's not fresh. The fruit and vegetables section looks nothing like the section in the ad," one subscriber commented.

Although some supermarkets do better than others, overall one in five people who had access to fruit and vegetables in their supermarket was dissatisfied with quality and freshness — people in remote areas were particularly concerned. After waiting at the checkout and manoeuvring the trolley through congested aisles, this was the third highest area of dissatisfaction in our survey.

'NO-NAME' PRODUCTS

More than six in 10 of our survey respondents had purchased 'no-name' products. Of FRANKLINS and JEWEL shoppers, significantly more people bought them.

Table 3 on page 13 shows the products most commonly bought — dry packaged goods and household paper products top the list, which is reflected in the relatively large market share of 'no-name' brands for these products. On the other hand, only 6% of the instant coffee on the market is unbranded, and only 8% of CHOICE subscribers regularly buy it.

As far as the quality of 'no-name' products is concerned, half of our survey respondents thought it to be generally about the same as that of 'name' brands; only 17% thought these products to be of worse quality generally. □

(%)	Quality and freshness of fruit / veges (%)	Ease of walking down aisles with trolley (%)	Speed at checkout (%)
1	80	78	71
2	86	81	
3	84	84	66
4	88		
5	77	89	
6	92		
7		92	
8	na	44	64
9		59	
10			92
11	na	61	
12			83
13			88
14			82
15	67		
16	71		80
17	na		

dissatisfied with the times at which they could go shopping.

Some stores seemed to be more successful than others at giving consumers what they want in specific areas. Table 4, *What the supermarkets are getting right* (above), shows how shoppers rated

How we shop

Aren't CHOICE subscribers a well-organised and well-informed bunch? The majority of our survey respondents take a shopping list and buy essentially the same products each time they shop, but more than half nevertheless make unplanned purchases — which goes to show that in-store marketing works.

Label information is important for our subscribers too. More than half of our respondents look for nutrition information and ingredients. It's interesting to see that slightly more people check labels for country of origin (69%) and use-by dates (76%) than compare costs between brands — perhaps it's too complicated a task, given that many retailers and regulators have as yet resisted our repeated push for unit pricing. (Unit pricing gives you the price for a unit such as 1 kg or 100 g on the label or shelf tag, so you can find out at a glance whether, say, a 340 g can of beans is better value for money than a 400 g can of a different brand.)

Shopping habits

What people do	Shoppers (%) (total no. 7710)
Take a shopping list	82
Buy essentially the same products each time	79
Check use-by dates	76
Check labels for country of origin	69
Compare costs between brands	68
Check labels for ingredients	64
Make unplanned purchases	59
Check labels for nutrition information	51
Compare prices with other stores	36
Read newspaper ads for specials	33
Check out the store's flyers	33

Cutting your phone bill

Choosing the right savings plan from Telstra or Optus is the easiest way to save money — moving to other 'service providers' brings risks as well as benefits.

EVER SINCE 1992, WHEN OPTUS started in competition with Telecom Australia (now Telstra), there have been claims you can get cheaper telephone calls by switching long-distance carrier. The market is now even more complicated: local calls are involved too. And it's not just Telstra vs Optus: there are other players — called 'service providers' — offering different services and different deals. We've taken a look at what's currently on offer, and help explain the pros and cons of the different telephone arrangements.

TELSTRA vs OPTUS

Telstra provides almost all the telephone connections to homes, and unless your home is passed by Optus cables, it's the only option you have for local connection. However, even if there's not an Optus cable in sight, you can select either Telstra or Optus to provide your long-distance and international calls.

Even once you've made your choice, you can still use the alternative carrier

**IN THIS REPORT YOU
WILL READ ABOUT:**

- Telstra vs Optus: Which is the cheapest for you? — see pages 16 and 17.
- Other telephone deals: the pros and cons — page 18.
- Choice for local calls — if you can get Optus — see page 19.
- Cheapest international calls: callback services — see page 19.

for long-distance calls by dialling an override code before the telephone number. To use Optus from a Telstra connection, dial 1456 before the number, and to use Telstra lines from an Optus pre-selected phone, dial 1411.

Which is cheaper? Both Telstra and Optus have standard charges and then offer a range of discounts (Telstra calls them Flexi-Plans) which can cut your bill. You need to choose the Telstra plan and ask for it to be applied, whereas the

Optus discounts are automatic.

Below we list the plans which are most likely to suit home users. None of them costs anything to join, but if you don't meet any usage requirements, you don't get the discount. You can change from one plan to another at any time.

THE PLANS

■ **Telstra Family and Friends:** 10% discount to five selected STD, international (0011, including fax) and mobile numbers. (STD and 0011 by definition

mean that you dial direct rather than going through the operator.)

■ **Telstra Select Saver:** 10% off calls to up to 10 selected STD codes and 0011 international (including fax) destinations if you spend over \$10 per month on calls to those selected codes.

■ **Telstra Smart Saver:** 15% discount on STD and 0011 international calls (including fax) if you spend over \$15 per month on these calls.

■ **Telstra 5% Local Call Saver:** If you spend \$10 or more per month on local calls you get a 5% discount on them.

■ **Telstra 15% Local Call Saver:** If you spend \$15 or more per month on local calls you get a 15% discount on them. However, it won't be applied to the first \$15 (and only up to \$100). Because of these limits, if you make fewer than 90 local calls per month you're better off with the 5% plan.

■ **Optus Instant Saver:** If you've pre-selected Optus for long-distance calls, you get an automatic 6% saving, which climbs as your bill goes up. If your average monthly Optus long-distance bill is over \$50 you'll get a 7% discount, and 8% discount on average monthly bills between \$500 and \$1000.

■ **Optus Advantage:** If you haven't pre-selected Optus, but use the override code to make Optus long-distance calls, you'll get a 1% discount once your average monthly Optus bill reaches \$30, 2% at \$50 — increasing in steps. At \$300 the discount is 5%.

We'd like to see Telstra automatically apply the discounts which best suit the user, in the same way as Optus does. Otherwise it's a bit like shopping for tomatoes in a supermarket, and getting a discount if you ask but paying full price if you don't.

Note: There's one further complication: as a rule Telstra bills quarterly, and Optus monthly. If you want to go with Optus but still keep your money earning interest for three months, you can ask to be billed quarterly.



OUR VERDICT

The pricing differences are small, and neither carrier is cheaper in all situations. You may think it's confusing — that's because it is! One of the things we'd like to see as competition grows in the telecommunications industry is simpler charging structures to make price comparison easier.

NATIONAL CALLS

■ For national long-distance calls over 85 km, 6 pm Friday to 8 am Monday: Optus weekend rate.

At 10 cents per minute, this is a winner for calls over 85 km even without the 6% Instant Saver discounts (which brings it down to 9 cents). There are also significant savings using Optus for calls over 745 km between 6 pm and 10 pm, Monday to Thursday.

■ However, for long-distance calls between 10 pm and 8 am, Monday to Thursday, even the basic Telstra economy rate (without any discount plan) beats the discounted Optus off-peak rates.

■ For national long-distance calls in peak times: Telstra 15% Smart Saver. Even if you'd qualify for Optus's 7% savings plan, the Telstra 15% discount rate offers more savings (with the exception of some calls between specified national capitals). However, you have to spend more than \$15 a month on these calls to be eligible.

If you're a Telstra customer, picking

and choosing your calls using the override code could give you the best of both worlds. For example, you'll probably find it pays to use Optus for long-distance calls at weekends. A 500 km, 10-minute weekend call with Telstra would cost \$1.28 (including a 15% discount) — \$1.12 with Optus (with no discount).

As an Optus customer, if you want to make long-distance calls after 10 pm during the week, it would work out cheaper to ring via Telstra by using the override code.

See Table 1 for full call cost details.

INTERNATIONAL CALLS

■ For international calls, the Telstra Smart Saver plan (15% discount once your long-distance bill reaches \$15 per month) works out cheaper than the Optus 6% Instant Saver (applied to all long-distance phone calls) for all the countries we looked at, except peak rate to Canada.

However, with no discounts applied to Telstra or Optus calls, all the countries were cheaper with Optus.

See Table 2 for full call cost details.

OVERALL

Looking at your overall long-distance phone bill, whether Telstra or Optus is cheaper depends on your calling pattern. If your long-distance phone charges are low (less than \$15 per month, or \$45 per quarter) it's likely preselecting Optus and getting the automatic 6% Instant Saver will work out cheapest. If you make most of the calls at weekends this can also be true



if your bill is usually higher. Beyond that, the complicated charging structure makes it impossible to generalise. Use your calling patterns and the information in *Our verdict* and the tables to decide.

■ If you're prepared to call Optus each time you get a bill and invoke the 'guarantee', Optus currently offers the cheapest bill. With the Optus guarantee, Optus will compare your Optus bill against what you would have paid with Telstra and, if the Telstra bill would have been lower, will credit twice the difference. To invoke the guarantee you need to call 1800 500 999. If you have just changed from Telstra, any Flexi-Plan you were on before will be used in the calculation. Otherwise, check which one would suit you best and ask them to use that one.

As we went to press the Optus guarantee had a closing date at the end of June next year.

Table 1: National call costs (cents per minute)*

Telstra (A)	Day	Night	Economy
Up to 50 km	12 (10)	9 (7)	6 (5)
50 to 85 km	21 (18)	15 (13)	9 (8)
85 to 165 km	31 (26)	22 (19)	13 (11)
165 to 745 km	32 (27)	23 (19)	14 (12)
Over 745 km	44 (37)	33 (28)	18 (15)
Optus (B)	Peak	Off-peak	Weekend
Up to 49 km	11	19	9
50 to 99 km	20	19	9
100 to 749 km	29	19	9
750 km & over	41	19	9

* Costs are rounded to the nearest cent and don't include the 12 cent connection fee. Lower rates apply between capital cities and for some other connections. Information correct as we went to press (the end of July).

(A) Where call itemisation is available. Figures in brackets are with 15% Smart Saver discount plan. Day rates 8 am to 6 pm weekdays, night rates 6 pm to 10 pm on Monday to Thursday. Economy rates apply at other times. In some areas call itemisation is not available and rates are a little different.

(B) Rates for automatic 6% Instant Saver discount. If you've preselected Telstra and are using the override code to use Optus, you'd pay a very little more per minute — for example, 10 cents at weekends. Peak rates from 8 am to 6 pm weekdays, off-peak rates Monday to Thursday 6 pm to 8 am. Weekend rates apply at other times.

Table 2: International call costs (\$ per minute)*

Country called	Telstra (A)		Optus (B)	
	Peak	Off-peak	Peak	Off-peak
Canada	1.39 (1.18)	0.99 (0.84)	1.24 (1.17)	0.94 (0.88)
Ghana	2.79 (2.37)	2.62 (2.23)	2.59 (2.43)	2.44 (2.29)
Greece	1.99 (1.69)	1.89 (1.61)	1.83 (1.72)	1.76 (1.65)
Hong Kong	1.28 (1.09)	0.92 (0.78)	1.25 (1.18)	0.85 (0.80)
New Zealand	1.03 (0.88)	0.72 (0.61)	1.00 (0.94)	0.66 (0.62)
Philippines	1.59 (1.35)	1.19 (1.01)	1.47 (1.38)	1.10 (1.03)
United Kingdom	1.28 (1.09)	0.99 (0.84)	1.19 (1.12)	0.94 (0.88)
United States	1.28 (1.09)	0.99 (0.84)	1.19 (1.12)	0.94 (0.88)

* Costs are rounded to the nearest cent and don't include the 12 cent connection fee.

(A) Figures in brackets are with 15% Smart Saver discount plan. Peak rates 9 am to 8 pm weekdays (to 6 pm for some countries including Canada, Hong Kong, NZ, US and UK).

(B) Figures in brackets are with 6% Instant Saver discount — which you won't get if you're using the override code to use Optus. Peak rates 9 am to 6 pm weekdays.

OTHER TELEPHONE DEALS

Companies which are registered and have their own networks are called carriers, and they provide the majority of services. Other companies have to lease lines or buy another carrier's service before selling it on to you. Currently Telstra, Optus and Vodafone (the latter only for digital mobile calls) are the only carriers in Australia.

The deals on offer from non-carriers come from the following types of service provider.

■ **Switched service providers:** You use their services by dialling a four-digit override code before the number you want to call. You remain a customer of your preselected carrier, but your call is routed through the switched service provider and they will bill you for it.

There are currently three of these companies offering residential service —

Global One, WorldxChange and AAPT (but the latter only for employees of its business customers). They offer deals on international and some long-distance calls — for example, Global One offers a 30% discount on Telstra rates to some countries, and WorldxChange sets its own rates. For the countries we looked at, WorldxChange rates were lower than all the Telstra Smart Saver also lower than discounted peak rates (except to Ghana), and discounted off-peak rates to Canada, Greece, the UK and US.

You need to sign an agreement with the company before you can use the service, and you'll be billed separately for calls made through its system. For more information contact: Global One on 1800 500 588 and WorldxChange on 1800 651 499.

■ **Resellers/bill aggregators:** These companies were set up to buy Telstra's long-distance phone services in bulk and

CONTACT DETAILS

■ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), (06) 264 1166.

■ Australian Telecommunications Authority (Austel), free call: 1800 335 526.

■ Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO), free call: 1800 062 058.

resell them. They qualify for a large-user discount by totalling calls made by a number of customers, and then pass on a proportion of the savings to the customer. Quite a few charities became resellers as well as commercial operators.

However, this business depended on Telstra's charging structure, which has now changed — and many of the companies which used to offer this service are no longer around. We found **First Netcom** and **Switch Telecommunications** still offering services to domestic customers — but both charge the same or more than discounted Telstra rates. It's no longer worthwhile changing to this type of service provider.

■ **Telstra 'Solution Plus' Dealers:** When Telstra introduced the discount plans for domestic customers which undermined the discounts resellers were able to offer, it also introduced approved dealers. They include **Auscorp**, **Equal Access** and **TFM**, offering the standard Telstra discount plans (see page 16) — so again there's no advantage in signing up with them.

FOR THE FUTURE?

The government is committed to deregulating the telecommunications industry by allowing new carriers into the market from July 1, 1997. Some of the present service providers are then expected to become fully-fledged carriers, competing to offer deals on a range of services.

Clearly, increasing competition could be good for consumers. But there do need to be some safeguards. The areas in which we'd like to see them include:

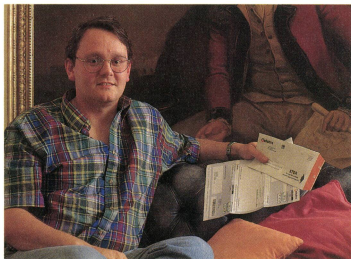
- No charges for switching carrier.
- Compulsory service provider registration with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman scheme.
- Simplification of charging structures to make comparison easier.
- Automatic application of savings plans (as is already the case with Optus).
- Number portability — so you can take your number with you if you switch the carrier providing your local calls.
- Strong monitoring by the ACCC for misleading conduct and of price advertising.

SAVINGS — JUST A CALL AWAY

When Tom moved to his new home in September last year, he checked the Telstra discount plans on offer and found the best one for him gave savings on calls to selected countries.

In May, Tom heard they were offering discounts on local calls too. He called Telstra to check, and was signed up for the 5% Local Call Saver. He was also told he should switch from his current international call discount plan to the new Smart Saver — and that his last monthly bill would have been \$11 less if it had been in place.

The clear message is: if you're a Telstra subscriber and you haven't checked on the discount plans recently, ring to find out which would suit you best — the savings can be considerable. Tom, who thought he had already chosen the best savings plan for him, stands to save over \$100 this year because he called the Telstra toll-free number (1800 052 052) and checked what was on offer. It's a pity Telstra has to be prodded into action instead of applying the best savings plan automatically, as Optus does.



INTERNATIONAL 'CALLBACK' OPERATORS

Another option for international calls is to register with a callback company that makes use of the fact that telephone calls are cheaper in the US.

You have to nominate the phone number you'll be making calls from in advance. You call a number in the US and hang up. You're then called back from the US and get a US dial tone.

If you guarantee to spend US\$25 per month, you can access the service with a freecall number, otherwise you'll have to pay for the call to the US — we're told the typical cost is 40 to 60 cents. Once you've got the dial tone you use the phone normally — there's no extra charge if you can't get through.

Telegroup is the largest callback group operating in Australia. Costs depend on the exchange rate with the US, but when we contacted them (in July) they were as shown in Table 3, below.

■ **Our verdict:** For some of the countries we looked at, this service offered some considerable savings over what's on offer from Telstra and Optus — even over their off-peak discounted rates. However, there is an inconvenience factor to take into account.

Telegroup plans to become a switched service provider (which you'll then access by dialling a precode), at which time Executive Director Kim Winter sees the callback operation being phased out, so it may not be a long-term savings option. If you're interested, contact Telegroup on (02) 9261 3374.

Table 3: 'Callback' vs normal carrier costs (\$ per minute)*

Country called	Telegroup**	Telstra off-peak (with 15% discount)	Optus off-peak (with 6% discount)
Canada	0.52	0.84	0.88
Ghana	1.61	2.23	2.29
Greece	0.93	1.61	1.65
Hong Kong	0.68	0.78	0.80
New Zealand	0.68	0.61	0.62
Philippines	1.18	1.01	1.03
United Kingdom	0.56	0.84	0.88
United States	0.44	0.84	0.88

* Cost in dollars per minute (charged in six-second blocks). Telegroup has a number of agents (including Satellite Cowboys and MRI) and you may be referred on to one of them.

** The Telegroup prices don't include the additional 40 to 60 cents per call you'll have to pay if your bill isn't at least US\$25 per month.

JOIN UP OR NOT?

Switched service providers can still offer some cheaper calls, but you may have to pick your times or countries to make sure of savings.

Neither a reseller nor a Telstra 'Solution Plus' dealer currently offers residential customers greater savings than those available directly from the carriers. We hope more competition next year will change this.

However, the major drawback to registering with a service provider or reseller is if you have problems — you're dealing with a smaller company and, by going through a reseller, you no longer have a relationship with a carrier, which is obliged to provide service.

If you're using a carrier you have assurances provided by licence conditions, regulatory standards and other

binding rules. In fact the government wants to put more obligations on carriers in the form of a 'Customer service guarantee', which would require them to meet strict performance standards for new connections, line repairs and appointments.

Carriers are required to be members of the independent **Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO)** scheme. Some of the other service providers have joined too, but they're not obliged to do so. The TIO scheme is independent of government, carriers and service providers and is free to residential and small business consumers — it can deal with most matters relating to the provision of a telephone service. We are pressing for the government to require service providers and resellers to be covered by the TIO.



Optus cables — more choice in local calls, but many think the cables are unsightly.

LOCAL OPTUS

If you're in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne or Sydney and you've got Optus cables in your street, you may have a choice of telephone service provider for local calls. At the end of June, Optus announced it was able to provide local call access. From this month it claims its local connection will be available in many areas.

You don't need to be a subscriber to Optus Vision, but Optus will need to install a new telephone line to your home (currently this will be free if you're transferring from Telstra), and you'll then pay line rental to Optus instead of Telstra (both \$11.65 per month). The main advantage is local calls costing 20 cents (currently 25 cents with Telstra) and 15 cents on selected days (Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, Australia Day, ANZAC Day, Mothers' and Fathers' Day). ■ The catch? You'll have to change your telephone number, and there's no guarantee the lower prices will last.

IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT

The TIO will generally be your second port of call (once you've approached the carrier or service provider). But if your complaint is about a regulatory issues such as pricing or competition, contact the **Australian Telecommunications Authority (Austel)**. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) deals with misleading advertising and other cases where a company has misrepresented its service. □

Buying a pool

Installing your own swimming pool is a big financial commitment. This report will help you take the plunge without ending up in deep water.

WINTER IS BARELY over and going for a swim is a long way from most people's minds. But if you plan to build a pool for this summer, now is the time to start. Working out a detailed plan, finding the right pool company, getting council approval, as well as the work itself, can take several months.

IS A POOL FOR YOU?

Not only are they quite expensive to install, a pool won't usually add value to your home. In fact, property professionals say you'll be lucky to recover the purchase costs of the pool when you sell your house — it may improve your lifestyle while you live there, but it will probably also narrow down the number of prospective buyers who are willing to take on the maintenance work and costs of a pool. An above-ground pool may be less of a deterrent because it can be removed more easily.

Before you finally decide to go ahead, ask yourself:

- Is your property suitable for the kind of pool you have in mind?
- Are you going to use the pool regularly enough to make it worthwhile?
- Can you cope financially with the maintenance costs in addition to the often considerable installation costs?
- Are you willing to spend several hours a week working to maintain your pool (see *Pool maintenance*, page 25)?
- Can your children swim (see *Safety*, page 23)?
- Do you have somebody who can look after the pool while you're on holiday?
- Do you want a pool for pleasure rather than to add value to your property?



It may look like fun, but you'll need to use your pool a lot to make the installation cost and ongoing maintenance work worthwhile.

If you can answer 'yes' to most of these questions, it's time to start planning.

PLANNING YOUR POOL

An above-ground pool requires much less planning than an in-ground one, and you can even install it yourself with the help of one or two handy friends (see *Above-ground pools* on page 24).

In theory — if you think you have the appropriate knowledge and experience — you can become an owner/builder and organise and supervise the installation of an in-ground pool yourself as well. However, we don't advise it — subcontracting the necessary tradespeople and co-ordinating the work can be very complex and demanding. You're probably better off employing a pool company, an architect or a specialist pool designer.

The first step is to develop a good idea of what you want:

- Ask your local council for a property site plan. Knowing the exact boundaries of your property is essential for the

positioning of the pool. The plan may also show you the water and gas services and the sewer and stormwater drains, which will also influence where you put your pool.

■ Also, ask your local council for information on planning and building regulations and any approvals you will need. For example, there may be special fencing requirements or limits on the height of above-ground pools.

■ Contact your water authority to ask whether it has any regulations or requirements.

■ Begin to think about the size, shape and style of your pool, as this may influence your choice of materials (see *Materials* on page 25).

■ Get an idea of the components and accessories you need (pump, filter, heater, cleaning system, steps, ladder, underwater lights and so on).

■ Consider the angle of the sun. Make sure you plan the position of your pool so the water isn't often shaded by build-

ings or trees and catches the sun, especially in spring and autumn. However, some shady spots around the pool are a good idea for hot days.

■ When thinking about the landscaping around your pool, keep in mind that trees and bushes shouldn't overhang the water. An excessive amount of fallen leaves, twigs and seeds can block the skimmer box and unbalance the pool water's chemistry, causing a lot more maintenance work.

■ Plan your pool so that components such as the filter and pump are easily accessible for maintenance.

Put plenty of time and thought into this stage — time invested in planning can save you from disappointment later. When you finally decide on the specifications of your pool with your builder, make them as detailed as possible to save problems and disagreements later.

The Swimming Pool and Spa Association of Australia (SPASA) can be a useful source of information — it publishes fact sheets on various aspects of pool maintenance and equipment as well as a magazine with background information, pool photos to give you design ideas, and trade addresses. SPASA also organises an annual pool show: this year it will be on September 14 and 15 in Sydney.

HUNTING FOR A COMPANY

Once you have a detailed idea of the pool you want, shop around for a pool builder that suits you.

Get several written quotes for the pool, accessories and landscaping you have in mind. This usually involves them visiting your home and inspecting the site. Use this opportunity to discuss your ideas. An experienced pool builder can tell you if they are realistic and can suggest options you may not have thought of. Also talk about the soil conditions and the accessibility of the pool site for building equipment (see *The pool that never was*, below). This visit also gives you a chance to see how professional the builder or company seems, and to judge whether you're likely to get along.

Compare the different quotes carefully and make sure they really cover the same products and services. When you've decided on a shortlist of companies, ask them for references from people in your area. It can be very helpful to talk to people who've actually dealt with the company and to see some of the builder's recent work. Ask whether the builder kept to the original price, whether they started and finished the work on time, whether any of the subcontractors were unsatisfactory and

how the builder handled changes that occurred during the installation.

If pool builders need a licence in your state (see *Fencing, licensing and insurance requirements* on page 24), contact the licensing authority and ask whether your preferred company has the appropriate licence. A licence is important because it usually requires some years of experience and guarantees a minimum level of skills and competence. In the case of a dispute you can also use the licensing authority's mediation services, and some licensing authorities can tell you whether there have been complaints against the company you're interested in.

It's also important that you're insured against uncompleted work. While all states and territories have some sort of warranty in place that covers faulty workmanship for several years (contact your licensing authority for details), insurance against the death, disappearance or bankruptcy of the builder is not always required. *Fencing, licensing and insurance requirements* gives details of which states do require this additional level of protection.

It's essential that the work of the builder and all subcontractors is covered by such insurance. If it isn't compulsory in your state, make sure you take out a private policy, which is available

THE POOL THAT NEVER WAS

Omiros and Vicki of Earlwood in NSW found the pool company salesperson's quote for the concrete pool they had in mind so convincing, they decided to sign the contract right away. The salesperson promised that work would start soon and asked for \$1500 deposit for the purchase of building materials.

A couple of weeks passed but nothing happened. After several phone calls, the pool company finally sent a builder to inspect the site. He decided that the ground was too wet to start excavating. Omiros and Vicki weren't happy that this hadn't been mentioned before and, when the excavation still hadn't started after eight weeks, they contacted the company again.

Yet more phone calls resulted in the builder coming for another inspection. This time he said he wouldn't be able to move in with a Bobcat without damaging the house because the driveway was too narrow. He said he had to arrange for a crane to lift the Bobcat onto the site and would need to use the neighbour's driveway to do so.

None of these problems had been mentioned by the salesperson when the contract was signed. As by then several months had passed with still no pool in sight, Omiros and Vicki decided to cancel the contract. Their first shock came when they discovered that about two-thirds of the deposit was actually the salesperson's commission — and he apparently wasn't an employee of the company.

The company used this excuse for refunding only \$75 of

the money — it said about one-third of the deposit had been spent on the builder and some materials, and the other two-thirds wasn't theirs to refund because it was the salesperson's commission.

Omiros and Vicki were willing to forgo the part of the deposit the pool company had already spent on their behalf, but they weren't prepared to lose the lot. However, the company continued to refuse their requests for a refund.

Finally, Omiros and Vicki took the case to the Small Claims Tribunal of NSW, which decided in their favour. However, they only made a claim for two-thirds of the deposit, and Vicki says, "The referee would even have awarded us the whole deposit plus some compensation if we hadn't just asked for a refund of the commission."





PHOTO COURTESY OF SPASA

Above-ground pools have a lot of practical advantages, but many people are put off by their appearance.

through SPASA (some insurance companies may also offer it). Don't let any work start before you're sure you're fully covered.

SIGNING THE CONTRACT

Your builder should use a standard contract written in plain English—the contract specified in the Australian Standard for swimming pools or one of the contracts developed by SPASA is suitable.

The contract should be as detailed as possible and at least include the following:

- The material to be used for the shell and lining.
- The shape, position, size and depth of the pool.
- The type, capacity and position of the filter.
- The exact position, model numbers and other important details of components such as the pump, skimmer box, heating, inlets, drains, lights, ladders, steps and handrails.
- Details of any landscaping or work on walkways and pool surrounds which is to be carried out by the company or builder.
- That all specifications meet all local regulations.

MAKING CHANGES

During the installation you may want to make changes and there may be unfore-

seen problems. Before signing the contract, negotiate how these situations will be dealt with. The contract should include a list of possible changes or situations that may arise (such as if your property is damaged or dirt needs to be removed). It should also specify the method of payment if you have to cover any extra costs—will you pay in a lump sum or on an hourly basis?

According to the NSW Department of Consumers Affairs, one standard-contract clause which causes a lot of complaints deals with “unforeseen subsurface conditions”. If your builder unexpectedly hits rock during the excavation, you may have to cover extra costs. If you don't want to risk the unknown, you can employ a structural engineer to carry out tests—but that can cost you several hundred dollars too.

Another problem can occur if the hole for your pool fills with water after heavy rain. The cost to pump the water out isn't usually covered by your contract—again, it's likely to be an extra cost for you.

Even if your builder uses a standard contract it's probably worth the extra expense to have it checked by a solicitor with experience in building law, an architect or a building inspector before you sign on the dotted line.

If you make an on-the-spot decision

to sign a contract after the salesperson's first visit (invited or uninvited) you're covered by the door-to-door sales act in your state. This gives you a three to 10-day cooling-off period (depending on the state or territory you live in) during which you can cancel the contract. The builder or company is supposed to tell you about this, but may not do so.

After signing the contract you'll have to pay a deposit, which shouldn't amount to more than 10% of the total cost. A more reasonable sum for a contract over \$20,000 is 5%. The contract should also include a schedule for further payments. Both the Australian Standard and SPASA contracts recommend the amount of the deposit and certain percentages of the total sum to be paid at different stages of the installation.

The percentages vary depending on the type of pool.

DURING THE INSTALLATION

Keep track of progress—is everything happening according to the plans and contract? This is especially important when it comes to making further payments. Only pay for work that has actually been completed.

No matter how carefully you've done your up-front planning and research and how detailed your contract is, there may still be problems with the timing or the quality of the work. These can range from simple communication problems which may be easy to resolve, to a substantial conflict. So it's important to be able to put your complaints in written form. Keep records of changes agreed to and other discussions, in case of a later dispute.

If you have a problem, talk to the person responsible first, for example the subcontractor who didn't show up. If you're not able to resolve the situation satisfactorily, get the builder or pool company involved—after all, co-ordinating is what you pay them for. If you still can't get a satisfactory resolution, mediation may be the answer.

Most state licensing authorities offer a mediation service if a licensed builder is involved in the dispute. And if you've

employed a builder or company which is a SPASA member, you can ask SPASA for help — it offers a similar mediation service for disputes.

If mediation doesn't work, you can consider taking your dispute to the Small Claims Tribunal in your state. But this can be a drawn-out and stressful option — coming to a compromise during mediation is usually preferable.

Contact details for licence information

ACT: Building, Electrical and Plumbing Control, PO Box 1908, Canberra 2601.

Phone: (06) 207 6309.

Fax: (06) 207 6324.

NSW: Building Services Corporation, PO Box 6000, St Leonards 2065.

Phone: (02) 9934 6557.

Fax: (02) 9934 6589.

NT: Territory Construction Association,

PO Box 37121, Winnellie 0821.

Phone: (08) 8981 9666.

Fax: (08) 8941 0275.

Queensland: Building Services Authority, PMB 84, Coorparoo (Distribution Centre) 4151.

Phone: (07) 3225 2855.

Fax: (07) 3225 2829.

SA: Business and Occupational Services (Office of Consumer and Business Affairs),

GPO Box 1719, Adelaide 5000.

Phone: (08) 8204 9644.

Fax: (08) 8204 9697.

Tasmania: Home Owners' Warranty Ltd, PO Box 498, North Hobart 7002.

Phone: (03) 6234 8922.

Fax: (03) 6231 2910.

Victoria: Building Practitioners' Board, PO Box 536E, Melbourne 3001.

Phone: (03) 9628 5674.

Fax: (03) 9628 5800.

WA: Builders' Registration Board, 1st floor, 18 Harvest Terrace, West Perth 6005.

Phone: (09) 321 6891.

Fax: (09) 321 2159.

Swimming Pool and Spa Association of Australia (SPASA)

PO Box 4698, Mulgrave 3170.

Phone: (03) 9886 1777.

Fax: (03) 9886 1877.

Safety

The most controversial but perhaps the most important safety feature of swimming pools is a fence with a safety gate. All states have fencing requirements for new swimming pools.

According to data from the National Injury Surveillance Unit in South Australia, infants under four accounted for about 60% of all pool drownings in Australia in 1993 and 1994.

The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia's statistics for 1995 found a similar figure (67%) and its report also says that about 40% of all infant drownings occurred in home swimming pools.

The number of infants drowned in pools has been slowly decreasing over the last few years. In states which have fencing requirements for existing pools as well as new pools, the overall rate of infant drownings is below the national average.

However, the Life Saving Society says that while, "Fencing is making some impact on the prevention of drownings ... it doesn't replace parental supervision." CHOICE agrees.

Even so, keeping children away from the pool is a key task. Kidsafe (the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia) recommends pools be fitted with the most efficient barrier: isolation fencing (that is, around the pool, not just around your property) with gates which comply with the Australian Standard. The fence and gates need to be checked regularly to ensure they are in proper working order.

In addition to proper fencing, childproof gates and adult supervision, there are several other things you can do to make your pool as safe as possible:

- Always supervise non-swimmers, as well as youngsters, when they're around or in the pool.

- Teach your children to swim as early as possible.

- Make sure the surface around your pool is non-slip and don't allow any running around the pool.

- Remove the ladder from your above-ground pool when it's not in use.

- Don't use electrical appliances or glass in the pool area.

- At least one family member should do a first aid course that includes resuscitation (CPR).

- Provide safety equipment at the poolside: an A(irway)-B(reathing)-C(irculation) chart, which shows how to resuscitate someone, a first aid kit (August CHOICE tells you how to spot a good one) and a flotation device (such as a life ring).

- Make sure that the chemistry of your pool is in balance — especially the chlorination.

Without proper treatment of the pool water, algae and bacteria can develop and be a health hazard. For information on handling swimming pool chemicals safely, see CHOICE, February 1996.

- Never leave your pool cover partially open (so that swimmers can't get trapped underneath), and never consider it as a substitute for a fence or proper supervision. Some covers give the illusion of a solid surface — which they clearly don't provide — and children may try to walk on them.



A pool fence is vital for safety: fewer infants have drowned in recent years in states that require a fence for existing pools, not just new ones.

COMPONENTS AND ACCESSORIES

■ **Pump.** This circulates the water through the filter and other treatment devices and runs the vacuuming system. The size you need depends on a number of factors, but it's better to buy one which is a bit oversized rather than undersized (to allow for times when your filter has to work harder — for example, after heavy rain).

■ **Skimmer box.** This is the pump's access to the pool water. It draws water from the pool surface to the filter and collects larger debris (leaves, insects, etc) in a basket. Position the skimmer box so that the prevailing wind blows towards it.

■ **Filter:** The pool water is constantly drawn through the skimmer box into the filter to remove small and microscopic particles from the water. As dirt is collected, it progressively causes the filter to become blocked, which restricts the water flow. This rising pressure is indicated by a pressure gauge. When the gauge reaches a certain level, the filter has to be cleaned or backwashed. There are three main types of filter material on the market:

— **High-rate sand** is a very efficient and easy-to-maintain filter material; it needs new sand filling only every three to five years. It has to be backwashed about once a month.

— **Diatomaceous earth (DE)** is more expensive and needs more maintenance work than other filter materials, but it is also very efficient — which means it blocks rapidly.

— **Cotton, polyester or paper sealed in a cartridge.** Cartridge filters block quickly and can't be backwashed, but

have to be removed and hosed down. They need to be completely replaced about every 18 to 24 months.

■ **Multiport valve:** A valve that allows easy cleaning and backwashing of sand or DE filters — you simply operate a lever to filter, backwash, rinse, recirculate or drain water.

■ **Hydrostatic valve.** Vinyl-lined and concrete pools need a safety valve to prevent the shell from lifting if the groundwater table rises.

■ **Cleaner:** An automatic cleaner will make your life a lot easier, and these days it usually comes as a standard part of the cleaning equipment. It travels along the floor and walls of the pool, removing the dirt to the skimmer box and filter.

However, you will still need some manual equipment such as a leaf scoop (for floating debris the automatic cleaner can't cope with) and a scrubbing brush (for stubborn stains and algal growth).

■ **Heater.** This can extend the swimming season considerably and so make the most of your outlay. **Gas heaters** are the most common type of pool heater, but electric and solar heaters are also available. Solar heaters have the advantage that their source of energy — sunlight — is free, and we get plenty of it in most parts of this country. A solar heater can't operate as efficiently on overcast days, so an additional gas or electric booster heater can be installed for year-round heating.

■ **Cover:** Pool covers help keep dirt out and heat in. They also virtually eliminate water evaporation — which can be as much as a 1.5 m layer off the top of your pool each year. For an eight-by-five-metre pool this means you can save about 60,000 litres of water yearly.

ABOVE-GROUND POOLS

MATERIALS

Above-ground pools consist of a shell made of plastic, timber or steel with a vinyl lining. A range of lining colours and patterns is available, and though the lining is very durable, it can be repaired or replaced if necessary.

ADVANTAGES

■ Quick to install — usually in one day.
■ Can be installed by two experienced handypeople if good instructions are provided and the site is easy.

■ No excavation work is necessary apart from levelling the site.

■ Much cheaper than an in-ground pool of the same size. Typical prices range from \$1500 to \$5500 plus \$500 to \$1000 for installation.

■ Can be dismantled and moved to another site (for example, if you move house).

■ As they're prefabricated, you can see what you're buying.

■ Can be installed partly in-ground.

DISADVANTAGES

■ Size and shape are dictated by the manufacturer's range. Although more variations are becoming available, you may still find your choice is limited.

■ There's no choice in the style of the internal pool walls — a vinyl lining is the only option.

Fencing, licensing and insurance requirements

Minimum fencing requirements for new pools: All states require that gates, doors and windows opening to the pool area, and the fence itself, comply with the Australian Standard. However, some local councils require fencing of the actual pool area, while for others it's sufficient to fence the property boundary. Some requirements of the standard are:

■ A barrier that will make it difficult for a young child to gain access to a pool area.

■ Minimum fence height of 1.2 metres.

■ Self-closing, self-latching gates in the fence.

■ All doors opening to the pool area must be self-closing and self-latching.

■ All windows opening to the pool area must be fitted with screens, bars and/or restricted opening devices.

Local councils in some states have their own

requirements, which may be more stringent — check with your council's planning/building department for the definitive answer in your area.

Minimum fencing requirements for existing pools: Vary from council to council — check with your local planning/building department.

The builder requires a licence in the ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria (after November 1, 1996); not in the NT, Tasmania and WA.

The builder must have insurance against uncompleted work in NSW, SA (for contracts over \$5000) and Tasmania (for contracts over \$5000). In Victoria there will be some kind of insurance or warranty required under new legislation, but at the time of publication it hadn't been decided whether this would cover uncompleted work.

IN-GROUND POOLS

MATERIALS

In-ground pools offer a greater variety of materials and finishes than above-ground pools:

■ **Premoulded fibreglass shells** are relatively quick to install and come in a large

choice of shapes, sizes and colours. Prices for larger pools start from \$10,000.

■ **Vinyl-lined shells made of aluminium, steel, treated timber or cement panels with a concrete floor.** These are easy to clean and maintain, are very durable and almost any size and shape are possible.

However, only a few companies offer this pool type. A large pool will cost between \$10,000 and \$12,000.

■ **Concrete shells** are the most expensive option and take the longest time to install. They're built entirely on-site and a variety of wall finishes is available:

— **Painted finishes** offer a variety of colours but have a relatively short lifespan of about five years before the pool has to be drained and repainted.

— **Pebble-coated finishes** have a rough surface which catches dirt and may wear equipment such as hoses.

— **Marble-sheen finishes** are a mixture of white cement and marble dust

which can leach and make it harder to keep your pool water in balance.

— **Ceramic tiles** are a fairly trouble-free finish, but they're the most expensive.

Typical prices range from \$9000 to \$12,000 for small pools and \$12,000 to \$15,000 for large pools with paint, pebble or marble-sheen finishes. Tiles will add another \$5000 to \$7000.

ADVANTAGES

■ You have a much greater choice of materials and internal wall finishes.

■ For most materials almost any shape is possible.

■ They are considered more elegant than above-ground pools in terms of landscaping.

DISADVANTAGES

■ Depending on the material of the shell and the finish you select, they are several times more expensive than above-ground pools of a similar size.

■ They take several days to weeks to install and considerable excavation work is needed.

■ In-ground pools stay with the house when you sell, and they usually won't increase the value of your house. □

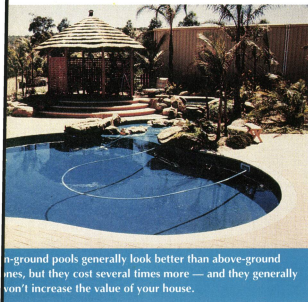


PHOTO COURTESY OF SPASA

In-ground pools generally look better than above-ground ones, but they cost several times more — and they generally won't increase the value of your house.

Pool maintenance

During summer a pool requires more maintenance than a 'sleeping' winter pool. The maintenance program given below is for summer use.

■ The most important task is to keep your pool chemistry in balance.

— The most important parameters — **chlorine and pH** — can be monitored relatively easily with a test kit, which you can buy from a pool shop. The chlorine test should be done weekly or even every second day during heavy summer use — see *Treating the water*, right, for details. The pH test needs to be done about once a fortnight.

— If you have a saltwater chlorinator (see right), check the salt concentration about once a month.

■ Make sure the safety equipment, especially the fence and gate, is in good working order (see *Safety* on page 23).

■ Clean the skimmer basket daily and remove any debris stuck in the basket holes. Replace the basket if it becomes split, to keep large particles from reaching and blocking the filter.

■ Remove leaves, twigs and other large debris from the surface and the bottom of the pool once a day with a leaf scoop.

■ Once a week brush the walls and the bottom with a nylon or stainless steel brush to get rid of algae and remove stubborn stains the automatic cleaner can't cope with.

■ Top up the pool once a week so that the water level always comes about two-thirds up the skimmer box. Otherwise the pump can draw air and be damaged.

■ Check the filter weekly.

■ Regularly check the accessible parts of your pool system for leaks and look out for unusually high water losses.

■ *'The Pool Book — How to clean & service your pool'* is a useful guide, available from our **Consumer Bookshelf** (see the order form on page 31).

TREATING THE WATER

Leaves, insects, dust, hair and other dirt are unavoidable pool pollutants. They're not only unsightly; together with the pool water they provide very good growing conditions for bacteria and algae. In high concentrations, these can become a health hazard. So it's not only important to remove debris from the pool but also to properly treat the water. This is most commonly done using chlorine to kill germs and algae.

■ **Chlorine** is available in liquid, granule or tablet form (for tips on the safe handling of chlorine, see *CHOICE*, February 1996).

Chlorine gets used up as it works, and it's also dissipated by sunlight and lost when water splashes out of the pool, so you need to top up the chlorine daily during heavy summer use.

■ To reduce the loss of chlorine through sunlight you should add it in the evening and also add a **stabiliser** to the water. Most modern chlorine treatments come with a built-in stabiliser.

■ Using a **saltwater chlorinator** — a device that produces chlorine from salt — can make pool maintenance easier. The amount of salt in the water is about 10 to 15% that of seawater, so your pool water will be slightly salty. However, you still have to monitor the chlorine concentration and make adjustments if the level is too high or too low. You also have to check the salt concentration about once a month, especially after heavy rain or backwashing the filter.

Brushing up on toothpaste

Billions of tubes of toothpaste are used worldwide each year and new varieties are constantly appearing. Are they all effective?

WITH MORE THAN 70 TOOTHPASTES on the Australian market — not including the various flavours each toothpaste comes in — it's not surprising people often ask us which one is the best.

The truth is that as long as a toothpaste contains fluoride it will do the job — most experts agree fluoride is the key ingredient for preventing tooth decay. However, the Australian Standard for toothpaste is only voluntary and toothpastes don't need to be tested to ensure they meet it. So no-one's checking, for example, that a year after manufacture, fluoride toothpaste will still contain enough active fluoride.

Toothpaste isn't tested by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) because it's considered to be a cosmetic product, not a therapeutic one (therapeutic goods are tested to make sure manufacturers aren't making false claims about their benefits).

The only toothpastes the TGA *does* check are ones for sensitive teeth, and any that have very high levels of fluoride

(for people with particular dental conditions).

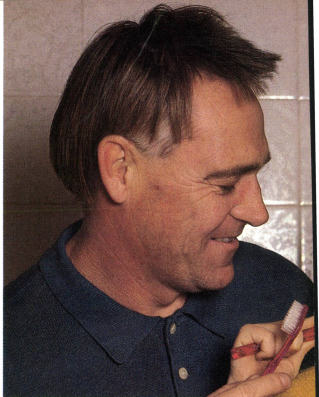
Regular toothpaste can remain in the TGA's unchecked category as long as it only makes claims like:

- The product helps maintain healthy teeth and gums.
- It protects against, prevents or fights tooth decay, complements tooth brushing and reduces cavities.
- It protects, toughens, hardens and strengthens teeth and tooth enamel (if it contains fluoride).
- It cleans, shines, polishes, brightens, whitens teeth, maintains healthy teeth, and removes stains.
- It keeps your mouth and breath clean and fresh, fights bad breath and helps relieve a dry mouth.

So don't base your purchase decision on fancy marketing — all manufacturers can make much the same claims. The key is to make sure you buy fluoride toothpaste.

IN BRIEF

- Brushing (even without toothpaste) is essential for healthy, clean teeth.
- Fluoride is the key protective ingredient in toothpaste.
- Buy from a shop with a high turnover — the newer the toothpaste, the more effective the fluoride.
- Beware of harsh smokers' toothpastes.
- Children only require a small amount of paste and shouldn't swallow it.
- If you use toothpaste for sensitive teeth, buy one with fluoride in it.



Children should always be supervised when brushing their teeth — swallowing the paste could mean they get too much fluoride.

Why use toothpaste?

Toothpaste has two main purposes:

■ **Protective:** The fluoride in fluoride toothpaste has long been proven to strengthen tooth enamel against the effects of plaque, a soft coat of bacteria and food debris which can build up on your teeth. The bacteria turn sugars in the food debris into acid, which in turn attacks tooth enamel.

■ **Aesthetic:** It helps your mouth look and feel temporarily clean.

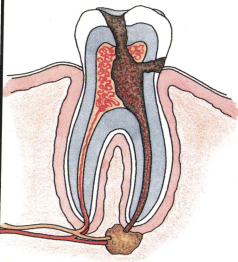
BACTERIA THRIVE

If you don't clean your teeth, within two days many millions of bacteria will grow on their surfaces. Left untreated, the resultant acid will eat through the enamel to the dentine (the chalky tissue beneath the enamel), before reaching the soft inner tooth containing nerves and capillaries.

DENTAL PROBLEMS

Untreated, plaque can also cause gum disease, starting with gingivitis (inflammation and bleeding), which may progress to periodontitis, where the tooth becomes loose as the supporting bone and tissue are destroyed.

Plaque can also grow in crevices between teeth and gums, between your teeth, and in the grooves in back teeth. Brushing often isn't enough to reach all



Poor dental hygiene can eventually result in major decay.

these crevices, which is why it's also important to use dental floss.

TARTAR CONTROL

Untreated plaque can also harden into tartar, which isn't an immediate dental hazard but looks unpleasant. Tartar can only be removed completely by having your dentist scrape it off.

Tartar-control toothpastes claim to stop tartar from forming. But the most important thing you can do to prevent tartar is to brush your teeth thoroughly and regularly.

HOW FLUORIDE WORKS

Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel. After brushing, any fluoride left on your teeth diffuses through plaque left hidden between and behind teeth and in teeth grooves. By penetrating the remaining plaque, fluoride helps to protect this part of the tooth from decay. Toothpaste without fluoride can't provide this protection.

FLUORIDE vs NON-FLUORIDE TOOTHPASTES

Even though fluoride is important in preventing tooth decay, there are toothpastes which don't contain it. They're usually called 'herbal', and consist of what their manufacturers call 'natural' ingredients. These offer a choice for people concerned about the potential side-effects of fluoride.

Questions have been asked for years about fluoride's possible health risks — which include accusations that it can cause cancer and genetic mutations. For this reason, the use of fluoride in water is also contentious. However, no firm evidence has been found and most experts believe the proven benefits continue to outweigh the unproven risks.

If you have doubts and want to use a non-fluoride toothpaste, remember that while they can make your mouth feel clean, without fluoride they may provide your teeth with little protection.

HERBAL INGREDIENTS

Herbal toothpaste's ingredient list usually sounds exotic, ranging from oak galls and nut grass to tea-tree oil and liquorice root. While there is evidence supporting the antibacterial effect of some herbal ingredients, it's not conclusive.

Using a herbal toothpaste is probably more effective than using no toothpaste at all, as it at least generally contains a detergent, which helps scrub off plaque. However, most decay starts in crevices toothbrushes can't reach, which is where fluoride comes in.

BAKING SODA

A number of toothpastes now contain baking soda (sodium bicarbonate). This is mildly abrasive, so helps scrub some



Toothpastes that contain fluoride provide your teeth with more protection against decay than those that don't.

plaque off your teeth, but it becomes less potent when wet on your toothbrush because some granules dissolve. Baking soda also has mild antibacterial and anti-acid properties, but there is no evidence thus far that it will fight gum disease or decay better than toothpastes that don't contain it. Again, it's still important to buy one with fluoride.

CALCIUM IN TOOTHPASTE

Some toothpastes, also contain calcium in the form of calcium glycerophosphate ('active calcium'), which some studies suggest will work with fluoride to help strengthen your teeth.

SENSITIVE TEETH

If you feel a stab of pain when you eat hot or cold food, see your dentist. The pain could have a number of causes, including a cracked tooth.

However, sensitive teeth are often the result of the dentine (the chalky tissue beneath the enamel) being exposed. This could be due to receding gums, over-enthusiastic brushing, advancing age or even acidic food and drink. The exposed dentine acts as a conduit to the inner root and nerve, which gives off a pain signal.

Normal fluoride toothpaste can help this problem, as the fluoride helps calcium to build up in the outer layer of the tooth,



Herbal toothpastes may contain exotic-sounding ingredients, but they often don't contain fluoride.



Toothpastes for sensitive teeth (top) — look for one containing fluoride. Children's toothpastes (above) — many come with flavours and gimmicks designed to encourage children to brush.

which gives it some protection. Alternatively, toothpastes for sensitive teeth contain desensitisers such as potassium nitrate, which can help by shielding the nerve endings. However, some of these toothpastes don't contain fluoride, and they may cost more than a normal toothpaste.

fluoride in a child's first seven years could result in dental fluorosis. A mild case may leave fine white lines in the enamel, but more severe cases cause chalky, opaque enamel which breaks apart soon after the tooth comes up.

While there's evidence toothpastes for sensitive teeth work, some dentists believe the dentine repairs itself with time, and brushing with a fluoride toothpaste is adequate. If you want to use a toothpaste for sensitive teeth, choose one that also contains fluoride — then your teeth are also protected against decay. Once the sensitivity decreases you can switch back to your regular toothpaste.

CHILDREN'S TOOTHPASTES

While it's essential for children to learn oral hygiene, it's also important for parents to supervise their tooth-brushing closely.

Toothpaste is not meant to be swallowed, yet children often do so. And consuming excessive amounts of

NOT TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Parents should only apply a smear (peasized at most) of toothpaste to the brush and encourage children to spit it out afterwards. For babies, a touch of paste on a cloth smeared over the teeth is enough.

If you prefer you can buy special toothpastes for children with less fluoride in them.



Smokers' toothpaste (top) and whitening toothpaste (above) — check with your dentist before using them over the long term.

Caring for your teeth

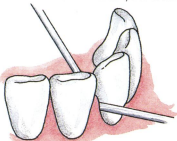
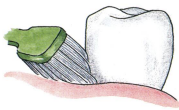
■ **Brushing:** Choose a brush with soft, rounded bristles. Using a firm circular motion, clean your teeth for one to two minutes on all faces — in front, on top and behind. Don't press too hard, or you could damage your teeth. Brushing twice a day is adequate.

■ **Replacing your brush.** Manufacturers recommend your brush be replaced every three months, but in fact you only need a new one when the bristles begin to look shaggy — if the bristles are bending, they can't get into the grooves of your teeth properly. How quickly this happens depends on various

factors, so use your discretion as to how often to replace your brush.

■ **Flossing:** This removes plaque from places your brush can't reach, and ideally should be done once a day, between all your teeth — including the molars (your back or 'double' teeth). Gently place the floss between the teeth. Sweep the floss up and down, rather than back and forth in a sawing motion. If your teeth are particularly close together and you find flossing difficult, ask your dentist about the best way to do it for your teeth.

■ **Mouthwashes:** Combined with brushing, these may help reduce plaque and can improve bad breath. While brushing is still the most effective method of cleaning your teeth, using a mouthwash too — especially one containing antibacterial agents like triclosan — can give your dental care a slight boost.



Proper brushing and flossing are important to prevent tooth decay.



To encourage older children to brush, there are toothpastes in a range of flavours including banana and raspberry, or with gimmicks such as sparkles and stripes.

SMOKERS' AND WHITENING TOOTHPASTES

Many smokers' and whitening toothpastes are imported and they can cost anything from \$2 to \$20. They're de-

signed for people whose teeth are stained superficially — usually as a result of smoking, or drinking large amounts of tea or coffee.

Smokers' toothpastes often have a higher than normal amount of abrasive, which scrubs the stained teeth. The effect is temporary, and after a week or two the teeth start looking stained again. This can lead to people using them on a long-term basis, which can damage the

teeth and expose the dentine, leading to increasingly sensitive teeth and gums.

Some whitening toothpastes contain hydrogen peroxide in quantities claimed to bleach away stains. Fears about long-term use of peroxide include its potential to damage gums and the interior of teeth.

So if you're planning to use a smokers' or whitening toothpaste, consult your dentist first. □

What's in your toothpaste?

Common ingredients are:

Abrasives

Abrasives work like a polish, their fine particles scouring away dirt and stains on your teeth. A good abrasive shouldn't damage your teeth, but if you brush too often, too hard or with a hard toothbrush, it's possible some damage will occur. Smokers' toothpastes often have harsher abrasives, which is why you shouldn't use them over the long term.

■ Common abrasives include: dicalcium phosphate dihydrate, calcium carbonate, alumina trihydrate, insoluble sodium metaphosphate, calcium pyrophosphate, magnesium trisilicate and hydrated silica.

Humectants

Humectants stop toothpaste from drying out both in the tube and when it's exposed to air.

■ The most common humectants are glycerol and sorbitol which, because they taste sweet, also contribute to the toothpaste's flavour.

Binding agents

Thickeners and binding agents prevent the toothpaste ingredients from separating into solids and liquids.

■ Common binding agents include: natural gums (arabic, karaya and tragacanth), seaweed colloids (alginates, Irish moss extract and carrageenan), and synthetic celluloses (carboxymethyl cellulose, hydroxyethyl cellulose).

Detergents

Detergents help loosen plaque deposits, so they come off more easily when you brush.

■ The most common detergent is sodium lauryl sulphate.

Flavouring

Flavour plays an important role in making toothpaste taste acceptable. The clean, fresh feeling toothpaste gives your mouth is important to get people brushing.

■ The most common flavours are peppermint, spearmint and wintergreen.

Fluoride

Fluoride provides an ongoing strengthening of the enamel — both during the teeth's development and in adulthood — protecting them from the damage caused by bacteria in plaque.

However, debate over possible side effects caused by fluoride in toothpaste and water remains heated (see *Fluoride vs non-fluoride toothpastes*, on page 27). For most experts the proven benefits of adding fluoride to water and toothpaste clearly outweigh the as yet unconfirmed risks.

■ Fluoride is usually added in the form of sodium monofluorophosphate, stannous fluoride or sodium fluoride.

Antibacterial agents

Commonly used in soaps, deodorants, mouthwashes and anti-acne preparations, antibacterial agents have been used in Australia for many years. While they aren't an ingredient of many toothpastes, they've been shown to contribute to the reduction of plaque.

■ Triclosan is the main antibacterial agent used.

Sweeteners

Sugar and honey are generally not used in toothpaste, because they may contribute to tooth decay. Instead, small amounts of sugar substitutes — proven safe against tooth decay — are added.

■ They include saccharin, sorbitol, glycerine, aspartame and cyclamates.

Preservative

Because toothpastes are moist, bacteria and mould can grow, so a preservative is added.

■ Common preservatives include: sodium benzoate, potassium nitrate and hydroxy benzoic acid ester.

Water

A large percentage of toothpaste can be water.



CHOICE Consumers' Diary 1997

Conveniently sized (15 x 22 cm), the CHOICE Consumers' Diary 1997 features: a week to an opening; a practical spiral binding that allows it to open flat on your desk; useful information, addresses and practical CHOICE consumer tips; monthly expense planners; and a names and addresses section.

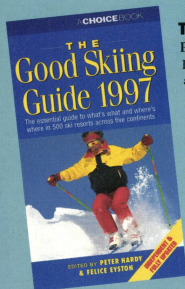
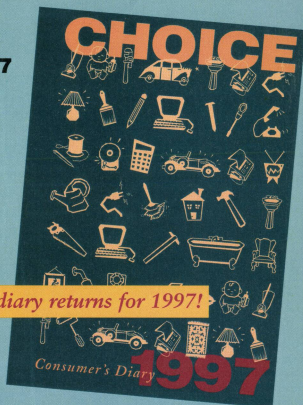
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Peter Hardy and Felice Eyston (editors)

Looking for fresh fields to ski? This is the only independent guide to over 500 ski resorts around the world, now in its eleventh edition and for the first time available in Australia. Focusing especially on Europe and North America but also including Australian and NZ information, this definitive ski resort reference guide contains lively, unbiased descriptions of the skiing, character and après-ski amenities of over 500 top resorts across five continents, with details of prices, ski schools, snowboarding, accommodation and childcare. Colour maps throughout illustrate the best runs. It includes:

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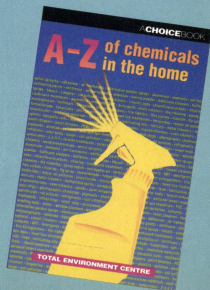
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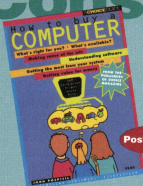
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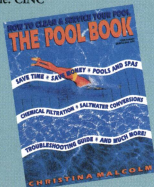


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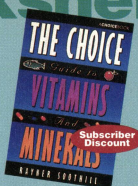
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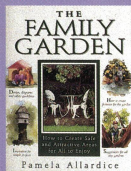
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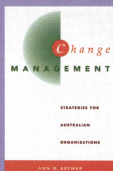
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There is limited stock available of each title and no back orders will be taken — so if you're interested in any of these titles get in early!



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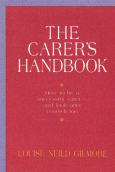
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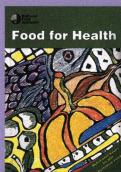
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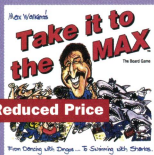
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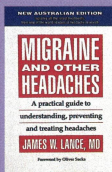
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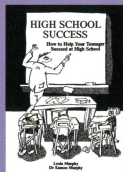
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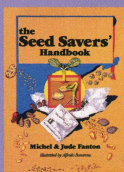
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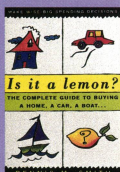
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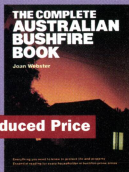
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The Complete Australian Bushfire Book
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Cleaning up the yard

Garden blower/vacs are becoming popular, but do you really need another electrical appliance to help keep your yard tidy?

THEY'RE PRETTY NOISY AND often fairly heavy and awkward to use, but garden vacuums, leaf blowers and combined blower/vacs are becoming increasingly popular. At the time of our research there were already 38 models in the shops. For this test we've chosen the most popular type — electric models.

All the models are designed to clean up leaves, grass clippings, garden debris and dirt, but they do so in different ways. Some types are better for particular tasks than others — so the different types are likely to appeal to different people. To find out which type suits you and the job you want it to do, check the comments under *Good if...* on pages 34 and 35. They'll tell you how the different types work and for which jobs they're particularly useful.

However, before deciding which type of garden cleaner you're going to buy, spare some thought on a few related aspects.

NOISE

Garden blower/vacs are extremely noisy, generally more so when used as a blower than as a vacuum. With half the models in our test, the user will be exposed to noise levels of 90 dB or more — that's about as loud as inside a factory.

The table on page 37 lists the noise levels we recorded when the products weren't sucking up or blowing debris. Depending on the material you pick up, however, it can increase by up to 10 dB. So it's very important to wear ear protection.

Apart from your health there's the annoyance factor — anyone close by

will be exposed to fairly loud noise as well. So they're generally subject to restrictions as to the times of day you can use them — not to mention simple neighbourhood courtesies.

THE ENVIRONMENT

You probably already own a number of electric or petrol-powered garden appliances. Adding a garden blower/vac to your collection will increase the burden on the environment — coal-generated electricity uses up fossil fuels and produces greenhouse gases. A rake or a broom is a more environmentally conscious choice.

While we're on the topic of environmental impact, make sure the debris doesn't land (and remain) on footpaths and roads, where it'll end up in waterways. You can, of course, throw it in the bin, but it's better put to use as mulch on your garden; some of the models tested come complete with a mulcher (for details see *Mulchers* on page 36).

And last but not least there's the dust. Cleaning the yard with a garden blower/vac is a very messy job. During our test in dry autumn weather, our testers were covered in dirt at the end of every day. And so would have been any washing left in our test yard (or its neighbour's) or inside the house, if the windows had been left open.

SAVING TIME

A garden blower/vac will probably save you some time if you have large deciduous trees and want to keep the yard free of leaves during autumn, or if you like to clean garden paths after you've mowed the lawn. But the time savings aren't as

great as you might expect if you use a blower/vac on lawns only, or if the model isn't very powerful.

The time scores in the table on page 37 are based on the total time it took us to clean up the test yard (120 sq m of lawn and paths). Manually — with a rake and a broom — it took us nearly 33 minutes. With the most powerful models in the test (which scored 75% for time) it took around 12 minutes; with the least powerful ones (which scored 60%) around 20.

If you only have a small yard and a few paths to clean, raking up by hand won't take very long and you'll get some exercise too. But if you really need a new gadget to help in your garden, here's what to buy.

WHAT TO BUY

Type 1 blower/vac*

RYOBI Electric Sweeper-Vac RESV 1100 A \$180

Type 2 blower/vac*

FLYMO Gardenvac Leaf Shredder MEV 750** \$200

HUSQVARNA BV 650 \$169

WEED EATER Gator Vac \$200 equal

Vacuum only

VICTA Vac 500 \$280

Blower only

WEED EATER Electric Blower 2510 \$100

* See pages 34 and 35 for an explanation of the two types of blower/vac and who might find each type useful.

** This model had the number GV 750 S when we tested.

The two McCULLOCH models we tested are not recommended — they were very difficult and irritating to use, and scored less than 50% for this aspect. See *Not recommended* on page 36 for details.



What to look for

Before you buy a garden blower/vac, look at the different types available in the shops. Pick them up and see which type you're most comfortable with.

- If you're looking for a combined blower/vac, try the models in both modes, as the thrust, weight and manoeuvrability vary in vacuum and blower modes.
- Likewise, if you're after a combination model, check how easy it is to convert from one mode to the other.
- Look for a model that's well balanced and not too heavy, with comfortable hand grips. Larger and heavier units should have a shoulder strap.
- Very powerful models can be tiring to use for an extended time because you have to push against the air thrust as well as support the weight.
- The controls should be well located for easy operation, and well labelled.
- Variable speed control is a useful feature.
- Collection bags should be easy to remove and have a large opening or zipper for easy emptying. (Large bags can become very heavy as they fill up, so smaller ones aren't necessarily worse.)
- If you want to use the model in an area with lots of sticks and stones, or to pick up larger pieces of rubbish, choose a model where the debris doesn't have to pass through the fan (see *Mulchers* on page 36 for details).

Garden blowers

Good it:

- You just want to blow grass clippings off paths and onto the lawn after mowing.
- You have a 'self-mulching' garden setting, where the debris can be blown from paths back onto the garden or under trees.

The equipment

A garden blower. It's much lighter and takes up less storage space than a combined blower/vac, but you can't vacuum up the debris. This type of machine works very well on hard surfaces, but on lawns it tends to leave some debris tangled in the grass and to lift grass runners — as do the less powerful combination units when used as a blower.

WHICH TYPE DO YOU NEED?

The points listed on these two pages tell you for which types of work the blower/vac is particularly useful. If your requirements don't exactly match a particular scenario, choose the type that's best for what you consider is most important.

Combination garden blower/vacs (Type 1)

Good it:

- You have a large yard with large areas of lawn and/or hard-surface areas (such as patios, decks or paths).
- None of the areas you want to clean up has lots of hard debris such as branches and stones.
- You want to blow the debris into a pile first, then vacuum it up; you're unlikely to change constantly between the blower and vacuum mode — and when you do, you don't mind having to change accessories.

The equipment

A combination blower/vac that uses specific accessories for each task, and that's relatively light and easy to manoeuvre but powerful enough to clean up large areas fast — the type we've referred to as Type 1. Models of this type are generally much lighter and less bulky (and for some people easier to handle) than those of the other type (referred to as Type 2 and described opposite).

However, to convert a Type 1 blower into a vacuum cleaner, you have to change accessories, which takes a while and is a lot more awkward than with a Type 2 one-piece unit — see the photo, right.

OUR CHOICE

RYOBI Electric Sweeper-Vac. This was the best performer of the combination blower/vacs of this type in our test.

Good points

- Lightweight and well balanced.

- Fairly easy to use.

- Easy to empty collection bag and reasonably easy to remove it.
- Power cord restraint.

Bad points

- Inconvenient to convert from one mode to the other, as are all the other models of this type.
- Debris passes through the fan, so you can't pick up larger items of rubbish such as stones or cans without risking damage to the fan.
- Vacuum tube may be a little too long for short people.
- A little heavy and tiring to use with a full collection bag.
- Potential danger! Motor will operate with fan guard removed.



Ryobi Electric Sweeper-Vac (also a mulcher)



Weed Eater Electric Blower 2510

OUR CHOICE

WEED EATER Electric Blower 2510. This was the only garden blower in our test.

Good points

- Small and lightweight.
- Works well on hard surfaces.
- Power cord restraint.
- Gives good control over debris.

Bad points

- Tends to leave some small leaves and sticks on grass areas.
- Becomes very tiring to use as it only has a single handle.
- A little slow.

Combination garden blower/vacs (Type 2)

Good fit:

You have an average-sized backyard with lawn and hard-surface areas (such as patios, decks and paths).

You want to clean up areas with hard debris and larger pieces of rubbish.

You want to be able to change easily between the blower and vacuum mode as you go.

You're strong enough to operate a fairly heavy piece of equipment.

The equipment

A combination blower/vac that can easily be converted from one mode to the other — we've called this Type 2. This type of blower/vac is a one-piece unit; you don't have to store lots of different pieces. At the flick of a lever or rotation of a knob, you can convert the large, cannon-like nozzle of the vacuum into a blower and vice versa. However, this type of blower/vac is generally less powerful than a Type 1 model — and it's fairly bulky and heavy.

OUR CHOICES

FLYMO Gardenvac Leaf Shredder (with the old model number **GV 750 S** or the new one **MEV 750**), the **WEED EATER** Gator Vac or the **HUSQVARNA** BV 650.

All performed equally well in our test and had the same features (except that the **FLYMO** vac is also a mulcher), so the profile below applies to all of them. The only other

difference between the models is that the bag containing the mulch from the **FLYMO** can be emptied easily, while it's more difficult to empty the unmulched leaves through the top of the bag on the **HUSQVARNA** and the **WEED EATER** Gator Vac.

Good points

- Very easy to convert from one mode to the other.
- Easy to remove bag.
- Can pick up larger and hard pieces of rubbish without damaging the fan, as debris doesn't pass through it.
- Gives good control over debris.
- Has a 'jet' vacuum setting to remove stubborn debris (see Note 4 on page 37).
- Well balanced.
- No access to moving parts.

Bad points

- Fairly heavy and bulky.
- On-switch has to be held down during



Flymo Gardenvac Leaf Shredder (also a mulcher)



Weed Eater Gator Vac

operation, which can become tiring over long periods.

- In blowing mode tends to leave behind some small leaves and sticks on grass areas.
- No power cord restraint.

Garden vacuums

Good fit:

You have a small yard and just want to vacuum up leaves from a very smooth lawn.

You regularly want to clean up smooth, hard-surface areas around the house, such as a garage floor or patio.

None of the areas you want to clean up has lots of hard debris such as branches and stones.

The equipment

A garden vacuum on wheels. The three models in our test gave a cleaner finish than any of the other types of equipment on grass. You push and pull them like an upright household vacuum cleaner, but it's important that the ground to be cleaned is very smooth, as they tend to dig into uneven surfaces. You obviously can't use a garden vac to blow the debris into a neat pile, but neither will they scatter it around, as blowers can do. They're much slower than leaf blowers on hard surfaces, but just

as fast on grass — and they leave it looking cleaner.

OUR CHOICE

VICTA Vac 500. This was the best of the three garden vacuums in our test — and it also mulches the debris it collects.

Good points

- Gives a very clean finish.
- Easy to remove collection bag and reasonably easy to empty.
- Power cord restraint.
- Two height settings for different types of surface.

Bad points

- A little slow.
- Nozzle is easily blocked if you want to vacuum up a pile of big leaves.
- Difficult to use in tight corners, around obstacles or on steps.
- Digs into even the slightest unevenness in the surface.



Victa Vac 500 (also a mulcher)

- Debris passes through the fan, so you can't pick up larger or hard items of rubbish.
- Becomes tiring to use.
- Bag tends to swing around a lot when full.
- Potential danger! Easy access to rotating fan when you remove the bag.

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer / distributor	Origin	Target price (\$)*	Warranty (years)	Type (see pages 34-35)	Weight of blower / v (kg)
	RYOBI Electric Sweeper-Vac RESV 1100 A	Ryobi	USA	180	1	Type 1 blower/vac	3.0 / 3.9
equal	BLACK & DECKER Vac'n'Mulch GW 150-46 VAM	Black & Decker	USA	220	2	Type 1 blower/vac	3.4 / 4.5
	WEED EATER Electric Blower/Vac 2560 (A)	Electrolux	USA	190	1	Type 1 blower/vac	3.0 / 3.7
	FLYMO Gardenvac Leaf Shredder MEV 750 (A) (B)	Electrolux	UK	200	1	Type 2 blower/vac	5.1 / 5.1
equal	HUSQVARNA BV 650 (C)	Husqvarna	UK	169 (F)	1	Type 2 blower/vac	5.0 / 5.0
	WEED EATER Gator Vac (A) (C)	Electrolux	UK	200	1	Type 2 blower/vac	5.0 / 5.0
	STIHL BE 55	Stihl	USA	150	1 (G)	Type 1 blower/vac	2.9 / 3.6
	STIHL ES 40 (D)	Stihl	Germany	260	1 (G)	Type 2 blower/vac	6.0 / 6.0
	VICTA Vac 500	Victa	Australia	280	1	Wheeled vacuum	— / 7.0
	TRIM RITE PU 1150	Trim Rite	Germany	249 (F)	1	Type 2 blower/vac	5.8 / 5.8
	WEED EATER Electric Blower 2510	Electrolux	USA	100	1	Blower	2.3 / —
	TRIM RITE V V 1200	Trim Rite	Not stated	275 (F)	1	Wheeled vacuum	— / 7.0
NOT RECOMMENDED							
	MCCULLOCH Eager Beaver II BLV-1500	Masport	USA (E)	180	2 (H)	Type 1 blower/vac	3.0 / 3.8
	MCCULLOCH Mac Vac 405 E	Masport	USA	300	2 (H)	Wheeled vacuum	— / 7.1

* Prices shown are good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in May 1996.

(A) These models are being discontinued, but they should still be available in shops for a while.

(B) This model had the number GV 750 S when we tested.

(C) The Husqvarna BV 650 is technically identical to the Weed Eater Gator Vac.

(D) This product has been recalled (see *Recalls and bans*, CHOICE, June 1996, for details). If you have this model, return it to your nearest Stihl dealer — contact 1800 032 159 toll-free for the address.

(E) The bag is from Mexico.

(F) Selling price recommended by manufacturer.

(G) If you send in the registration form, keep a logbook and have the blower/vac inspected after six months, the warranty is extended to two years.

(H) Warranty information provided is for the US, not Australia.

(J) Uses replaceable nylon line, so the fan can't be damaged.

(K) Also has airflow adjustment to give jet vacuum.

(L) Also has airflow adjustment to give jet vacuum and jet blow.

Mulchers

The three garden vacuums in our test and six of the combined blower/vacs (all the Type 1s and one Type 2 — the **FLYMO**) are designed to mulch leaves and garden waste as well. A mulcher comes in handy even if you can't use all the mulch in your garden or compost. It can reduce the volume of your garden waste substantially, so you can collect more waste in the bag and need less space for its disposal. Depending on the design, however, a mulching facility may pose some problems.

Except for the **FLYMO**, on all the other mulching models the debris collected has to pass through a fan to be mulched. It works well for leaves, but can pose problems if you pick up hard objects such as small stones, gumnuts, sticks or items of rubbish — they have the potential to damage the fan. On the **MCCULLOCH Eager Beaver** and — to a much lesser extent — the **RYOBI**, the plastic fan blades were noticeably damaged after our tests.

The other models with plastic fans and those with metal fans scraped through the tests unscathed, but their fan blades may well get damaged if used in a very stony area. And with a damaged fan your blower/vac is likely to perform less effectively. Picking up stones and sticks by hand beforehand — as some

manufacturers advise — seems to defeat the purpose of having a blower/vac.

So if you want to use a mulching blower/vac on an area you know has lots of small stones or other hard debris, or you want to be able to pick up larger items of rubbish as well, the best option is the **FLYMO**, which mulches by means of a nylon line rotating at high speed. The debris you collect doesn't have to pass through its fan to be mulched, so hard items won't be shredded — you just sort them out of the mulch.



A mulching garden vac is more practical if the debris doesn't have to pass through a fan — it's too easy to damage the blades.

Safety

- As with all outdoor appliances, use a safety switch.
- Always wear earmuffs or plugs to protect your ears from noise, and safety goggles to protect your eyes from flying debris.
- Keep bystanders away when you're using a garden blower.
- Always turn your garden vac off and disconnect it from power before you attempt to clear a blockage. Virtually all electrical devices with blades are potentially dangerous.

However, because of their design or a special built-in switch, the **BLACK & DECKER** and all the Type 2 blower/vacs in our test are pretty safe in this respect — you can't get access to the moving fan while the blower/vac is switched on. On all the other models tested, you — or a child with a smaller hand — can reach the rotating fan, although you'd have to be fairly absent-minded to do it.

Not recommended

The two **MCCULLOCH** models are not recommended because they were too hard to use. The **Eager Beaver** was more than usually inconvenient to convert from blower to vacuum, vibrated a lot and has only one handle, which made it tiring to use in both modes.

The **Mac Vac** (a garden vacuum only) has a stand you can pull out with your foot to stop the machine from falling over if you let go of the handle. During our tests the stand constantly dropped down and dug into the ground. To be able to complete the testing, we had to tape the stand up.

	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Char	Picks up litter	Motor speed settings (number)	Noise at user's position / at 7.5 m (dB)	Time score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
		1	86 / 78	75	66	71	RYOBI Electric Sweeper-Vac RESV 1100 A
		1	94 / 84	75	56	66	BLACK & DECKER Vac'n'Mulch GW 150-46 VAM
		1	90 / 80	70	62	66	WEED EATER Electric Blower/Vac 2560 (A)
✓	1 (K)	89 / 75	65	65	65	65	FLYMO Gardenvac Leaf Shredder MEV 750 (A) (B)
✓	1 (K)	89 / 73	65	63	64	64	HUSQVARNA BV 650 (C)
✓	1 (K)	89 / 73	65	63	64	64	WEED EATER Gator Vac (A) (C)
	2	90 / 80	70	56	63	63	STIHL BE 55
✓	2 (L)	86 / 76	60	64	62	62	STIHL ES 40 (D)
	1	90 / 76	60	63	62	62	VICTA Vac 500
✓	1 (L)	85 / 78	60	61	61	61	TRIM RITE PU 1150
	1	87 / 78	60	60	60	60	WEED EATER Electric Blower 2510
	1	95 / 79	60	55	58	58	TRIM RITE V V 1200
	1	94 / 86	75	43	59	59	McCULLOCH Eager Beaver II BLV-1500
	1	94 / 78	60	35	48	48	McCULLOCH Mac Vac 405 E



Shop Vac

We also took a look at the **SHOP VAC**, which is marketed as an indoor/outdoor, wet/dry vacuum cleaner. However, it's pretty difficult to drag the canister behind you on a lawn, so we decided it's not a 'serious' garden vac and excluded it from our ratings.

You can use the **SHOP VAC** for vacuuming up dust and dirt from smooth outdoor surfaces such as the patio, garage or workshop floor, but it won't cope with too many or large leaves — it blocks up. It can be converted into a blower too, but in terms of performance, the 'serious' garden blowers and combined garden blower/vacs in our test left it far behind.

As a garden blower/vac, we can't recommend it.

Similar models

■ We tested the **McCULLOCH Eager Beaver II BLV-1500**, a combination blower/vac. It's technically similar to the **McCULLOCH Silver Eagle II**.

1 Type

For a photo and a detailed description of the different types of garden blower/vac, see pages 34 to 35.

2 Mulcher

Even if you have a separate mulcher, it's a useful feature on a blower/vac as it mulches the leaves as you pick them up, which means they take less space. See *Mulchers* for details and associated problems.

3 Picks up litter

To pick up larger pieces of rubbish you need a Type 2 blower/vac (see *Combination garden blower/vacs* on page 35 for details).

4 Number of motor speed settings

On the two **STIHL** models you can choose between two motor speeds — maximum power for jobs such as blowing leaves into a pile and a lower setting for gently vacuuming or blowing around delicate plants.

An **airflow adjustment** is also useful, to remove stubborn items such as wet leaves or clumps of dirt stuck to paths. The 'jet' setting on some models allows you to vary the airspeed and redirect the air down a different part of the nozzle. Models which have this feature are footnoted in the table.

5 Noise

We measured the noise in decibels (at

the user's position and 7.5 m away) in a typical backyard while the units *were* working on debris. When they are sucking up debris, the noise level can increase by up to 10 dB, depending on the material picked up. For more details see *Noise* on page 33.

6 Time score

No matter which model you use, you generally get similar cleaning results in the end, but with some it takes longer than with others. So our time score is in fact a performance measure. The time score is based on the time it took us to clean up a 120 sq m yard onto which we had strewn the same amount of leaves each time.

Depending on the type of blower and/or vacuum, the total clean-up time includes the time it took us to blow the leaves into a heap, to convert from blower to vacuum, to suck up the leaves or to pick them up by hand.

The higher the time score, the more suitable the models are for cleaning up large areas.

7 Ease of use score

Depending on the type of machine, we examined how easy they were to use as a blower and/or as a vacuum with an empty and full bag, and how much time and effort it took to convert them from one mode to the other. We also looked at how easy it was to remove and to empty any bag.

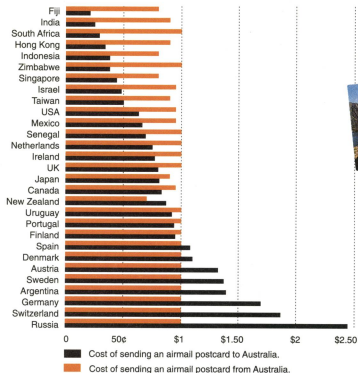
Models with an ease of use score of less than 50% are not recommended — see left.

8 Overall score

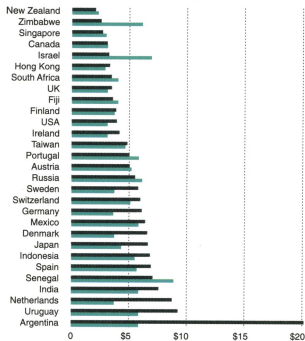
We considered ease of use just as important as time, so both scores are weighted equally (50%).

KEEPING IN TOUCH

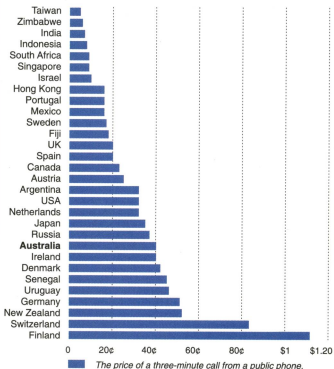
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Vacuum cleaners

Choosing between an upright or barrel vacuum cleaner often means choosing between good dirt removal or ease of use.

WHEN IT COMES TO DIRT pick-up vs ease of use, there's a clear distinction between upright and barrel vacuum cleaners.

The best of the three uprights we tested removed significantly more dirt than the best of the barrels, but on average the uprights were harder to manoeuvre and use than the barrel vacuum cleaners.

This means when you buy a vacuum cleaner, you need to decide whether an upright's better dirt removal is more important to you than the convenience of a barrel cleaner.

BEST FOR DIRT REMOVAL

One reason uprights may be better in general for dirt removal is because of their rotating brush "beater", which separates the carpet strands and allows dirt to be sucked out from the bottom of the pile.

However, buying an upright doesn't guarantee maximum dirt removal from your carpet — some models are much better at dirt pick-up than others. For example, the **HOOVER Turbopower Lark UI318** removed more dirt from the carpet than the **GOBLIN Laser 1500XT**.

There wasn't much difference between the barrels for dirt removal — most sucked up similar amounts in our test. The **SANYO SC75** had the highest dirt pick-up of the barrels, but it still removed less dirt than the lowest-scoring upright, the **GOBLIN Laser 1500XT**.

EASE OF USE

While most uprights are better for dirt removal, as in previous tests our testers found barrel cleaners much easier to store, carry and manoeuvre.

A barrel's long wand means it can reach under low furniture that you

might have to move if using an upright.

The lighter wand and head also make vacuuming stairs easier than with uprights, which are harder to manoeuvre, especially if they're heavy.

Barrels can be dismantled if necessary for relatively compact storage, whereas uprights need a tall storage space (or a hidden corner). If you have appropriate storage space and don't want to dismantle your barrel cleaner, many come with a convenient clip for connecting the wand to the barrel. The barrels tested also have retractable cords, a handy storage feature. None of the uprights in this test has this.

WHAT DO YOU GET FOR MORE MONEY?

You can buy a vacuum cleaner for \$99 up to several thousands, the latter often claiming all sorts of marvels in terms of performance. (Incidentally, when we tested four of these \$1000 to \$2000 models some years ago, they scored a little better than the models in this test for dirt removal, but scarcely enough to warrant paying that kind of money.) For this test we wanted to see what you get when you pay \$200 rather than \$400 to \$500.

Of the 14 vacuum cleaners we tested, 11 cost between \$150 and \$200, while three were in the \$400 to \$500 range; we've listed them in two separate groups in the table on page 44. The three expensive models were picked as well-known brands (**HOOVER**, **AEG** and **PHILIPS**) that would be representative of the higher price range — other models may



perform slightly better or worse.

With barrel cleaners, what you seem to get for the extra money is improved ease of use: the two expensive barrels (**AEG Vampyr 7303.2** and **PHILIPS Turbo TCX772/A**) had the highest scores for ease of use in this test — but only just. The kinds of comment our tester made on the AEG's (the top scorer's) ease of use were: "Excellent head movement ... aided in the cleaning of edges, corners and under low furniture," and, "It has a very easy-to-change dustbag which closes as it's pulled out, minimising the amount of dirt spilt or inhaled."

Both the AEG and the PHILIPS have extendable wands, which are easier to adapt to your height. The PHILIPS also has a remote control fitted on the wand which turns the machine on and off and varies the power (hence increasing or lowering suction).

So that's the kind of thing you might get by paying \$400 to \$500 instead of \$200 or less, although some of the cheaper models in the test scored almost as well for ease of use (the **PANASONIC MC-2760** and the **SAMSUNG VC-7513V**).

What you don't seem to get by paying more for a barrel cleaner is significantly better dirt removal — along with the cheapies, the two expensive barrels scored just 20-25% for this.

As for the uprights, again you may get improved ease of use if you pay more: the \$460 **HOOVER Turbopower 2 U2462** has on-board accessory storage and comes with a variety of brushes and

Profiles

HOOVER TURBOPOWER LARK U1318

Target price: \$200
Type: Upright

Good points

- Best in this test for dirt removal.
- Disposable paper dustbags can be used more than once.
- Can be adjusted for different carpet pile heights.
- Very light for an upright cleaner.
- Controls are easy to use.

Bad points

- Short reach due to relatively short cord.
- No on-board provision for carrying tools (which are only available as optional extras).
- Difficult to vacuum under low furniture (like most uprights).
- The noisiest vacuum cleaner tested.



PANASONIC MC-2760

Target price: \$180
Type: Barrel

Good points

- Very good head movement, and easy to vacuum under low furniture.
- On-board accessory storage.
- Has hose clip and wand holder.
- Light in weight.
- Has the option of disposable or reusable dustbags.
- Dustbag-full indicator.

Bad points

- No upholstery brush supplied.



SANYO SC75

Target price: \$200
Type: Barrel

Good points

- Has the option of disposable paper or reusable cloth dustbags.
- Dustbag-full indicator
- Can be converted to a blower, which is useful for jobs like blowing up an airbed.

Bad points

- Hose tends to kink.
- No upholstery brush supplied.



nozzles, while the \$200 HOOVER TurboPower Lark has none of these. On the other hand, it scored better for dirt removal than the more expensive HOOVER.

CARPETS AND FLOORS

Different types of carpet mean different results from your vacuum cleaner. Our test scores are valid for the particular type of carpet we tested on (chosen to show up differences between cleaners). While the dirt removal scores might be slightly different on a different type of carpet, the comparison between models will be the same.

An upright may be unsuitable for some carpets because its beater system could cause them to 'mat' or 'fur'. So if you have new carpet, check with the

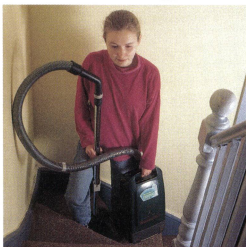
carpet company or manufacturer first whether the cleaner you have is suitable.

If you have hard floors that you also want to vacuum, barrel cleaners are a better choice as they generally pick up more dirt than uprights on hard surfaces and make less noise, as there's no beating action. But check first if the machine's instruction manual recommends them for this purpose — some may scratch wooden floors.

POWER AND PERFORMANCE

With vacuum cleaners, power is not necessarily related to performance — don't let a salesperson try to convince you otherwise.

In our test, the vacuum cleaner with the second-lowest dirt removal, the



If you have stairs, a barrel vacuum cleaner is much more practical than an upright.

HITACHI CV-2500

Target price: \$160

Type: Barrel

Good points

- High dirt removal score for a barrel cleaner in this test.
- Easy to vacuum under low furniture.
- Well-positioned carry handle.
- Relatively light in weight.
- Indicator lets you know when filter unit is full. (A filter unit is like a cloth dustbag in that you need somewhere to empty it.)

Bad points

- No on-board accessory storage.
- No upholstery brush supplied.
- On/off switch can't be easily operated by foot.

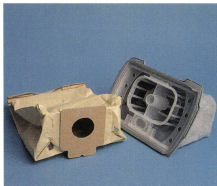


SAMSUNG VC-7513V, drew the most power — 1.4 kW. In contrast, the HOOVER Turbopower Lark removed the largest amount of dirt, yet was one of the lowest users of power — 0.5 kW.

THEY'RE ALL NOISY ...

... But that said, uprights tend to be noisier than barrel vacuum cleaners. In this test, the noise levels from the uprights ranged from 79 to 83 dB, while most of the barrels ranged from 69 to 76 dB.

The HOOVER Turbopower Lark — the best cleaner for dirt removal — was the noisiest of the vacuum cleaners tested, registering 83 dB. The EUREKA Express reached 81 dB, and our testers considered its sound particularly annoying — a complaint we've heard about other EUREKA models.



Some people prefer disposable dustbags, others reusable ones — the pros and cons are listed below right.



On-board storage for accessories helps stop them getting lost.

WHAT TO BUY

Models costing \$150-\$200:

For the best dirt removal

HOOVER Turbopower Lark U1318 (U) \$200

The easiest to use

PANASONIC MC-2760 \$180

A compromise between both

SANYO SC75 \$200

HITACHI CV-2500 \$160

(U) Upright

We didn't include the GOBLIN Laser in this list because, while it had an overall score that matched some of those in the list, it had a relatively low score for an upright for dirt removal, and a low ease of use score. If you want a cheap upright you're better off with the HOOVER Turbopower Lark.

The three models representing the \$400 to \$500 price range show the differences you're likely to find by paying more: a very slightly higher overall score, largely achieved by a little better ease of use. If this is what you want, use *What to look for*, right, to shop around for the machine that suits you best in that price range.

What to look for

- Space:** If you live in a small home or have furniture low to the floor, a barrel vacuum cleaner will probably suit you better. They generally remove less dirt than an upright, but they're easier to manoeuvre and store.
- Weight:** A heavy vacuum cleaner is harder to move around or carry up and down stairs, so before you buy it, lift it and move it around in the shop. Upright cleaners are easier to carry if they have a 'stair' or carrying handle.
- Noise:** Turn the machine on in the shop and try to assess whether it's too loud or irritating.
- Ease of use:** While the cleaner is on, check to see that the head glides easily, without scraping or sticking, over hard and carpeted surfaces. The on/off switch should be easy to locate, large, well-marked and easy to operate. Check whether the length of the cord is adequate for your home layout.
- Convenience:** Features such as a retractable cord and on-board storage for accessories make general storage and carrying the machine easier. But on-board storage should be easy to use, including opening and closing any door, and fitting tools in.
- Adjustable head height:** If you have carpets with different pile heights, choose a vacuum cleaner with adjustable head height.
- The dustbag:** Check to see whether it's paper (disposable or reusable) or cloth, or if the cleaner has a filter unit instead. Reusable paper bags, cloth bags and filter units can be messy to empty, but at least you don't find you've suddenly run out of dustbags. On the other hand, if you live in a unit or suffer from dust allergies, a cleaner with disposable paper bags may be a better choice (they save you shaking out the bag); some even close on removal from the machine. Check first if the paper bags are easy to buy and how much they cost — some are both hard to find and expensive. Is the bag or filter unit easy to remove and insert? Try it out while you're in the store.
- Performance:** Some barrels have an optional turbo 'power head', which, while it costs more, can lift their performance on carpet.
- Power consumption:** High power consumption doesn't equal best cleaning performance. In fact, our top performer for dirt removal, the HOOVER Turbopower Lark, used the least power.

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price (\$) *	Warranty (years)	Weight (kg)	Crevice nozzle	Upholstery nozzle	Dusting brush	On-board accessories
	MODELS COSTING \$150-\$200									
	HOOVER Turbopower Lark U1318 (U)	Southcorp	Australia	200	2 (D)	5.2	Optional	Optional	Optional	
	PANASONIC MC-2760	Panasonic	Malaysia	180	2 (E)	6.4	✓	✓	✓	✓
	SANYO SC75	Sanyo	Japan	200	2 (F)	6.7	✓	✓	✓	✓
	GOBLIN Laser 1500XT (U) (A) (B)	Shop-Vac	Ireland	200	2 (G)	5.7	✓	✓	✓	✓
equal	HITACHI CV-2500	Hitachi	Singapore	160	2 (H)	5.4	✓	✓	✓	✓
	SAMSUNG VC-7513V	Samsung	Korea	200	ns	9.3	✓	✓	✓	✓
	PHILIPS Vitali HR 6377/A	Philips	Holland	180	2 (J)	7.0	✓	✓	✓	✓
equal	PANASONIC MC-4500	Panasonic	Malaysia	200	2 (E)	5.7	✓	✓	✓	✓
	SANYO SC53	Sanyo	Japan	180	2 (F)	5.7	✓	✓	✓	✓
	EUREKA Express C20H (C)	Electrolux	Australia	150	2 (K)	6.6	✓	✓	✓	✓
	GOBLIN 410 (C)	Shop-Vac	China	200	2	7.1	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MODELS COSTING \$400-\$500									
equal	HOOVER Turbopower 2 U2462-306 (U)	Southcorp	UK	460	2 (D)	8.1	✓	✓	✓	✓
	AEG Vampyr 7303.2	Andi Co	Germany	500	3 (L)	8.4	✓	✓	Optional	✓
	PHILIPS Turbo TCX772/A	Philips	Holland	400	2 (J)	9.5	✓	✓	✓	✓

(U) Upright model.

(R) Reusable

ns Not stated.

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for, based on nationwide checks in May 1996.

(A) Also known as the Goblin Laser 1920P.

(B) Cleaning head may scratch some hard floors.

(C) Discontinued earlier in 1996, but you may still find it in some shops.

(D) Two years' free parts and labour, not including belts, brushes and dustbags.

(E) Parts and labour, not including dustbag and accessories.

(F) Parts and labour, not including vacuum cleaner belt, and only one year for tools and hose.

(G) Parts and labour, not including belts, brushes, filters and dustbags.

(H) Parts and labour, not including cleaning of filters.

(J) Parts and labour, not including transportation costs.

(K) Parts and labour, not including filters, dustbags, drive belts, transport charges, damages or loss during transportation.

(L) Parts and labour.

(M) Both reusable and disposable paper dustbags are available.

For people with disabilities

People with a physical disability should particularly look for a vacuum cleaner that:

- Has controls that are easy to use.
- Has dustbags that are easy to remove and replace.
- Is light and easy to manoeuvre.

Barrel cleaners that are rounded at the front of the machine are less likely to get stuck on corners, doorways or furniture. If you have back problems, uprights require less bending for most people.

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre examined the machines in this test and picked out the following:

- The **HOOVER** Turbopower 2 U2462, one of the more expensive uprights in our test, has a dustbag that's reasonably easy to change (it can be changed with one hand). The controls are near the normal hand position, are easy to press and don't require the balance that foot controls need. On the downside, it's quite heavy and may become tiring over long periods.
- The **HITACHI** CV-2500, one of the barrel cleaners in our *What to buy* list, is light and compact and could be used by people with back problems or in wheelchairs, as it's easier to pull around.

1 Accessories and on-board storage

The accessories most likely to be supplied with your vacuum cleaner are a dusting brush, a crevice nozzle (for narrow corners and around chair cushions) and an upholstery brush (for curtains and soft furnishings). With some machines you have to buy them as optional extras. On-board storage for these tools is very convenient, saving cupboard space, clutter and the likelihood of lost pieces.

2 Dust collector

There are basically two types of dust collector for vacuum cleaners — dustbags and filter units. Dustbags can be either cloth or paper, and the paper ones can be disposable or reusable.

Filter units are essentially a space next to the hose inlet covered by either a cloth or a series of

plastic filters, in which the dirt is collected. Dust has to be shaken out of the filter area, the cloth cover or filters, which can be messy and might create problems for people with allergies. However, with a filter unit you'll never find yourself with a full vacuum cleaner and no new dustbags.

3 Variable suction/variable power

Suction can be lowered on some barrel cleaners by opening a 'bleed' valve on the wand. This helps prevent fabrics such as rugs and curtains being sucked into the cleaning head. Opening the bleed valve will increase the noise level, but if it's only for a short period of time it may not bother you too much.

On some machines, suction can be lowered by reducing the machine's power, which also reduces its noise level.

3

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Variable suction
(bleed valve)

Variable power

Dustbag-full indicator

Blower

Noise
(dB)Dirt removal
score (%)Ease of use
score (%)Overall score
(%)

Brand/model (in rank order)

(R)				83	56	60	58	HOOVER Turbopower Lark U1318 (U)
/ paper (R) (M)		✓		75	21	82	45	PANASONIC MC-2760
/ paper	✓		✓	75	25	72	44	SANYO SC75
				82	35	55	43	GOBLIN Laser 1500 XT (U) (A) (B)
unit	✓		✓	70	24	72	43	HITACHI CV-2500
	✓	✓	✓	71	18	81	43	SAMSUNG VC-7513V
/ paper	✓			73	20	75	42	PHILIPS Vitall HR 6377/A
unit	✓		✓	74	21	71	41	PANASONIC MC-4500
unit	✓		✓	76	23	69	41	SANYO SC53
	✓		✓	81	22	71	41	EUREKA Express C20H (C)
/ paper		✓	✓	76	16	60	34	GOBLIN 410 (C)
(R)				79	38	67	49	HOOVER Turbopower 2 U2462-306 (U)
/ paper		✓	✓	71	24	87	49	AEG Vampyr 7303.2
/ paper		✓	✓	69	23	83	47	PHILIPS Turbo TCX722/A

equal

equal

equal

4 Dustbag-full indicator

Although it's useful to know how full the dustbag or filter unit is, your vacuum cleaner will perform better if it's emptied regularly. If you have a cloth dustbag, washing it should remove any dirt clogging its pores which may be affecting the machine's performance.

5 Blower

With some machines you can reverse their operation and blow out air, which can be useful for jobs like blowing up an airbed.

6 Noise

We measured noise from the user's position. Uprights are generally noisier than barrels, but see *They're all noisy* on page 43 for comments on specific models.

7 Dirt removal score

We embedded 100 grams of specially prepared dirt into a section of carpet and vacuumed it to a set pattern and speed. The dirt collected was then weighed and recorded as a percentage of the dirt applied. After doing this three times for each cleaner, we averaged the results.

We used a carpet that was particularly demanding on the vacuum cleaners and helped to distinguish those that were better

at dirt removal from those that weren't very good. On other carpet types the difference may not be so marked, but the comparisons remain valid.

8 Ease of use score

This was based on how easily the body of the vacuum cleaner could be manoeuvred and how easy it was to move the cleaning head over carpet, under low furniture, how close it could get to edges and into corners, and how difficult it was to

empty and change the dustbag and to use the accessories. We also took into consideration use on stairs, on-board accessory storage and ease of use of controls.

9 Overall score

We calculated the overall score by weighting dirt removal and ease of use as follows:

- Dirt removal: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%



You're more likely to have to move low furniture to clean underneath it with an upright than a barrel.



RECALLS AND BANS

THE PRODUCT: Fisher and Paykel has recalled its **Soft Touch model cooking products** purchased in NSW between July 1995 and April 1996. They have the following serial number bands:

EPD125796 to EPD126535; EYD131409 to EYD136161; EUD140855 to EUD145185; RFD141873 to RFD149234; EAD126536 to EAD131408; EKD136162 to EKD140851; ELD145186 to ELD147869 and RID149235 to RID152296.

The serial numbers are located on the left-hand side of the frame of the product after opening the oven door or the lower oven door (where fitted) or after sliding out the warmer drawer (where fitted).

The problem: The electronic controller used in these products may become "confused" if the voltage suddenly surges or drops below the normal supply of 240 V, which may cause the oven to overheat when it's turned on.

What to do: Contact Fisher and Paykel on 1800 809 208 to arrange a free replacement of the oven's controller. Until then, you can continue using the oven but:

- After each use turn the main power to the appliance off at an isolating/main switch.
- Don't leave the oven unattended while it's in use.
- Don't use the automatic cooking function.

SAFETY WARNINGS

THE PRODUCT: Bonds Industries has issued a safety notice for the following products:

- **Babygro Terry Coverall**, style 956P3, in mint, rose, blue and white, sizes 0 and 1, sold in a clear polybag in pharmacy outlets and retailers between June 1995 and June 1996.

The problem: Some of the garments don't bear any flammability warning label. These garments should be labelled 'Styled to reduce fire danger'.

- **Bonds Brushed Terry Romper with embroidery**, style 956TR, in blue, mint, pink and white, size 000, 00 and 0, sold in Big W stores between February and June 1996.

- **Babygro Printed Crossover Romper with bows**, style 156B4, in white, sizes 0000, 000 and 00, sold in many retail stores and major department stores between November 22, 1994 and June 1996.

- **Babygro Printed Fleece Tracker/Sleeper with patches**, style 952P11, in navy and red, sizes 000, 00, 0 and 1, sold in a number of retail stores including major department stores, between January and June 1996.

The problem: These garments bear the warning label 'Styled to reduce fire danger'. Sizes 0 and 1 are required to bear the label 'Warning—high fire danger. Keep away from fire'. Customers should be aware that, whilst sizes 00, 000 and 0000 are not required to bear a flammability warning, these garments are also highly flammable.

What to do: For information contact 1800 054 321.

THE PRODUCT: Repco Mag Air 3000 exercise bike, model no. JAPC 3000.

The problem: Sold without a warning label as required by the Australian standard.

What to do: Use on a level surface.

THE PRODUCT: Repco Cycle Company has recalled the **Repco Bionic and Repco Ergo Exercise bicycles**, model numbers RB8000 and RE7000, sold between February and June 1996.

The problem: Sharp edges on the Bionic, and guards which don't meet the Australian standard on both the Bionic and the Ergo exercise cycles.

What to do: Ring Repco on the following numbers to arrange for modifications:

NSW: (02) 9756 3999.
Queensland: (07) 3345 8522.
SA: (08) 8297 7011.
Victoria: (03) 9574 7000, freecall 1800 645 992.
WA: (09) 358 1553, freecall 0800 888 567.
All other areas: freecall 1800 645 992.

THE PRODUCT: Philips has recalled **68 cm (29 inch) and 59 cm (25 inch) colour television models 29SP1790/75, 29SP1698/75, 25SP1788/75 and 25SP1688/75**. The serial number can be found at the rear of the set on a white label accompanied by a barcode. They were sold between 1992 and 1994 and have detachable, side-mounted speakers.

The problem: An element of an internal circuit board could suffer solder fatigue after prolonged use or following extreme climatic conditions, and arcing could occur.

What to do: Contact Philips Customer Information Centre on 13 13 91 to arrange for your TV to be inspected. Until then, don't leave these models on unattended.

THE PRODUCT: Hunters Sportsline has recalled all **Denise Austin and Bollinger brand Trim Rider exercise machines** sold by K Mart and Target.

The problem: Cracking and breaks may occur in the weld joining the frame and the front leg stabilisers, possibly resulting in injury.

What to do: Return the machines to your local K Mart or Target store for a refund. For more information contact 1800 627 623.

THE PRODUCT: Target has recalled the following garments (the code numbers are on the collar label):

- **Ladies' cotton/polyester top** with brushed cotton outer surface, zip neck, tartan trim, and 'Essential E Spirit' motif. Oatmeal colour. Sizes 8 to 18. Code number: 10590102.

- **Boys' polyester/cotton Grandpa Neck top** with brushed cotton outer surface, three-button neck opening with 'Momentum' motif. Oatmeal colour. Sizes 8 to 14. Code number: 10574201.

- **Boys' cotton/polyester Tunic Sweat** with two brushed cotton inset panels with 'Authentic' motif. Burgundy colour, sizes 3 to 7. Code number: 10557589.

- **Boys' cotton/polyester Button-through Shirt** in brushed cotton outer surface with two chest pockets. Burgundy colour, sizes 3 to 7. Code number: 10575802.

The problem: The above garments may pose a potential fire hazard to the wearer if exposed to a naked flame. The fire hazard reduces with regular washing.

What to do: Return the garment to your nearest Target store for a refund or an exchange. For information, contact Target Customer Relations Department on 0800 814 788.

THE PRODUCT: Coles Supermarkets has urgently recalled all jars of **Muconia coffee** (all varieties) bought from Coles Supermarket at Kings Langley, NSW, located in the Kings Langley Shopping Centre, corner of James Cook Drive and Raven Hill Streets.

The problem: The product may have been tampered with, and could constitute a serious health risk.

What to do: Do not consume the product. Return it immediately to your nearest Coles Supermarket for a refund. For information, contact 1800 150 023.

THE PRODUCT: Mitsubishi Motors Austral has recalled a number of **NH/NJ Pajeros, TS Magna sedans and wagons, KR/KS Veranda sedans and wagons and 3000GT vehicles**. The following vehicles are affected:

- NH Pajero: All vehicles.
- NJ Pajero: From Body Number 1 to 4414.*
- 3000GT: From Body Number 1 to 96.
- TS Magna sedan and wagon with ABS brakes: From Body Number 1 to 47632.*
- KR Veranda sedan and wagon with ABS brakes: All vehicles.*
- KS Veranda sedan and wagon with ABS brakes: From Body Number 1 to 8059.

The model and body numbers appear on the vehicle compliance plate in the engine compartment.

* Not all vehicles in this range affected.

The problem: Affected vehicles may develop a small crack in the upper front brake hoses, leading to leakage of brake fluid. If this occurs, brake pedal travel will increase and effectiveness of the vehicle's footbrake may be reduced (but the parking brake is not affected).

What to do: Drive the vehicle with caution at brake pedal travel and stopping distance may increase unexpectedly. Contact any MMAL Dealer, ship or the MMAL Customer Relations Manager in your state:

NSW: (02) 9797 3805, Queensland: (07) 3368 5710, NT and SA: (08) 8275 7560, Tasmania and Victoria: (03) 9895 3624, WA: (09) 383 5513.

THE PRODUCT: Ansell International has recalled **Lifestyles Ultrasure 12's Condoms with Nonoxynol-9**, all batches.

The problem: The product may fail to comply with the Australian Standard. All other Ansell condoms are unaffected.

What to do: Do not use them. Return to: Reply Paid Permit No. 144, Quality Control Manager, Ansell International, PO Box 4125, Mulgrave 3170. Ansell will reimburse you by cheque.

CUSTOMER NOTICE

THE PRODUCT: Grace Bros is offering a refund for the following garments:

- **Boys' Hot Jamm polyester/rayon sweat-shirt**, brushed rayon outer surface with two-tone grey stripe neck and wrist trim. Oatmeal colour, sizes 8 to 16.

- **Boys' NRG cotton/polyester tab front shirt**, brushed cotton outer surface with two chest pockets. Grey colour. Sizes 8 to 16.

- **Jeans Plus 'Watercooled' polyester/cotton sweatshirt**, brushed cotton outer surface with embroidered chest logo on left side. Oatmeal and brown colours. Sizes 5 to XL.

- **Jeans Plus '26 Red' polyester/cotton sweat-shirt**, brushed cotton outer surface with contrast rib neck and wrist trim. Oatmeal colour. Sizes 5 to XL.

- **Jeans Plus '26 Red' polyester/cotton zip front jacket**, brushed cotton outer surface with black zip at centre front and pockets. Oatmeal colour. Sizes 5 to XL.

The problem: These garments may pose a potential fire hazard to the wearer if exposed to a naked flame. The fire hazard is reduced with regular washing.

What to do: Avoid exposure of the garment to a naked flame. If you want a refund, return any of the above garments to your nearest Grace Bros store with proof of purchase.

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION

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Writers/journalists this issue: Birgit Baader, Laine Bennett, Tom Crawley, Michael Hohl, Jan McLean, Barry Melville, John Pospisil, Brendan Wynter. CHOICE is a registered trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association. For information on subscriptions and back issues, see the order form on page 40.

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COMPUTER CHOICE (published quarterly) provides information and tests for home computer users who want to know how to get the best from their computer without being confused by jargon and technical mumbo-jumbo. **Editor:** John Pospisil. **Technical editor:** Peter Dower.

CONSUMING INTEREST, our quarterly policy and campaigning magazine, provides straight facts, probing analysis, in-depth reporting, informed opinion and stimulating debates on consumer issues. It also gives updates on the lobbying and campaign projects of the Consumers' Association. **Editor:** Peter Cerehxe.

CHOICE TRAVEL This magazine is produced by the UK Consumers' Association and reprinted by CHOICE four times a year. Its products are independent in the same style as CHOICE and, while they're written from the perspective of a European base, most of the information in them is just as useful to travelling Australians.

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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters

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What's the 'best' toothpaste? Any with fluoride in it — the rest is just marketing hype.
See the report on page 26.

